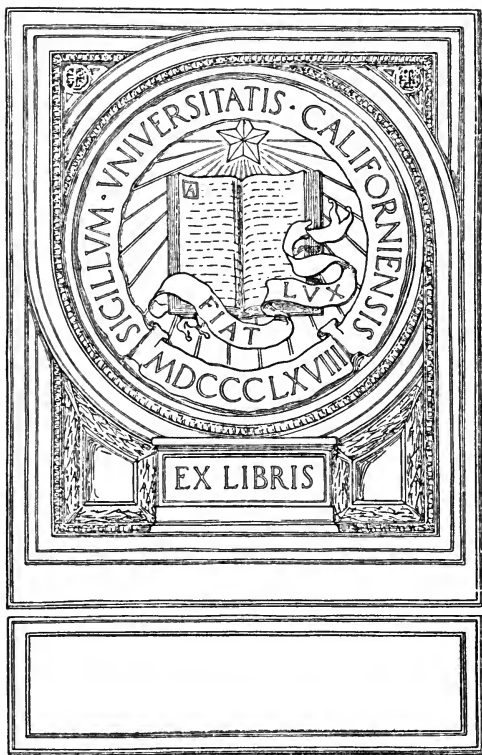


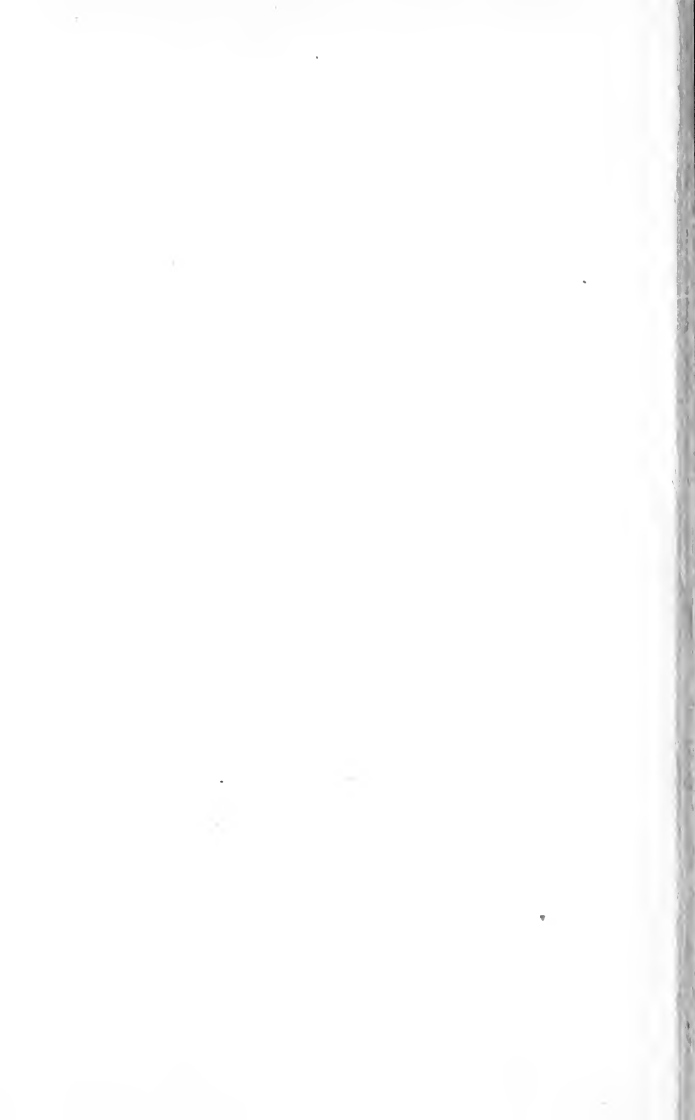
UC-NRLF

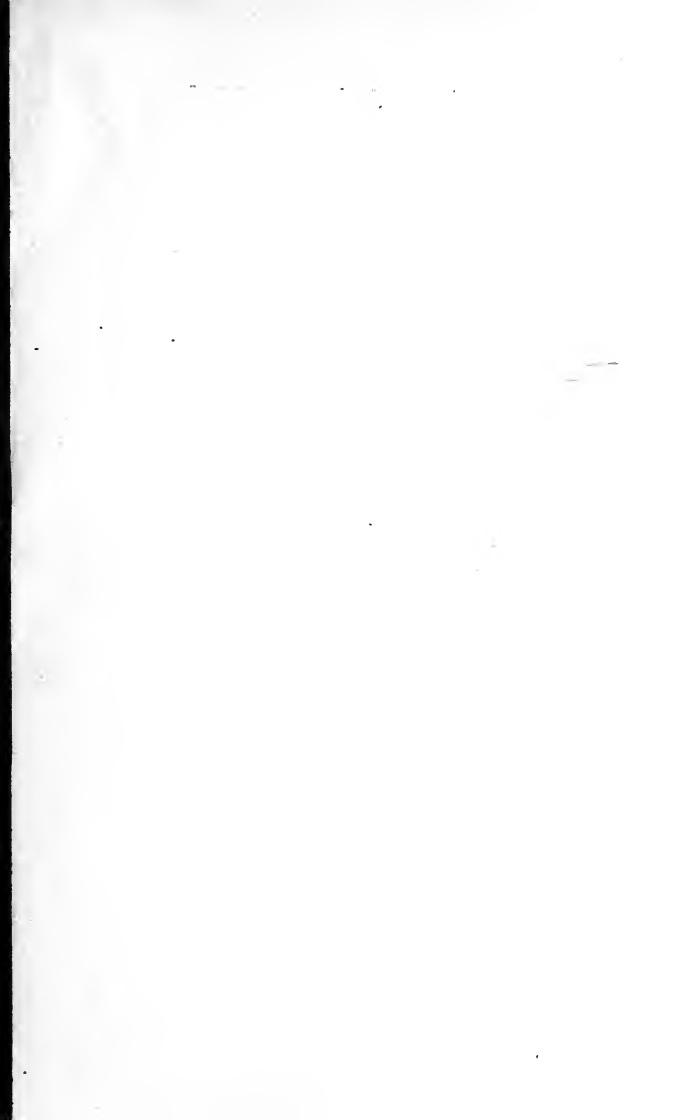


B 3 139 702



EX LIBRIS





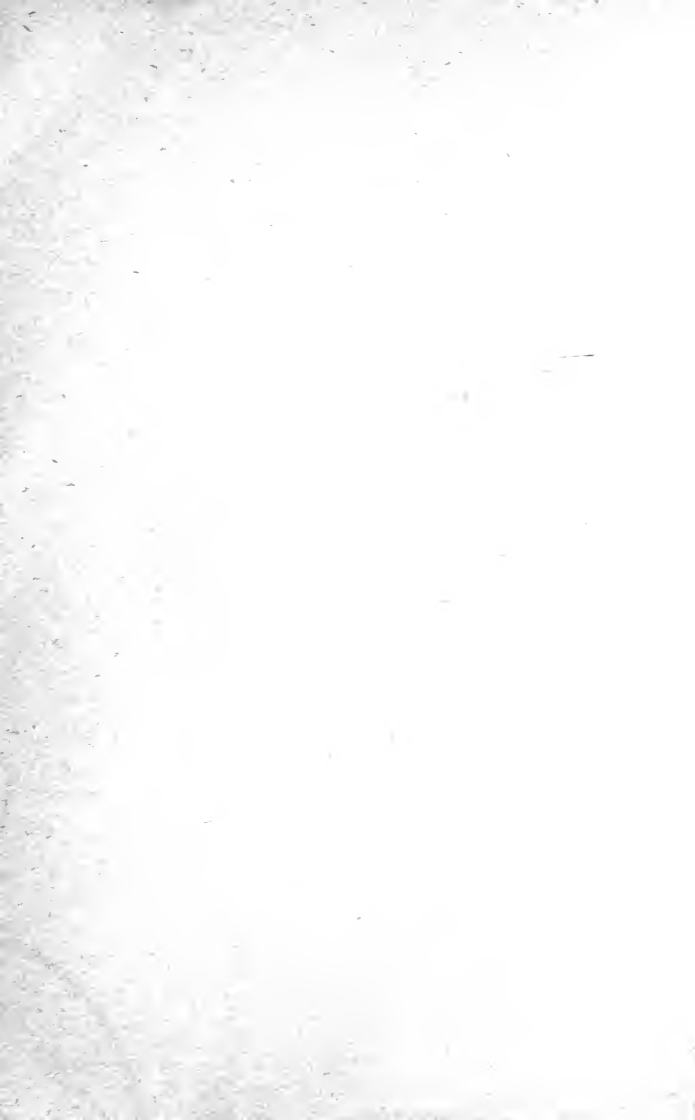


STORIES BY FOREIGN AUTHORS



FRENCH

III





STORIES BY FOREIGN AUTHORS

FRENCH

- THE HIDDEN MASTERPIECE . . . BY HONORÉ DE BALZAC
THE SORROW OF AN OLD CONVICT BY PIERRE LOTI
THE MUMMY'S FOOT BY THÉOPHILE GAUTIER
FATHER AND SON BY EDOUARD RAO
LAURETTE OR THE RED SEAL . . BY ALFRED DE VIGNY

HONORÉ DE BALZAC
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1899



HONORÉ DE BALZAC

STORIES BY FOREIGN AUTHORS

OF FRENCH

THE HIDDEN MASTERPIECE . . . BY HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE SORROW OF AN OLD CONVICT BY PIERRE LOTI

THE MUMMY'S FOOT BY THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

FATHER AND SON BY EDOUARD ROD

LAURETTE OR THE RED SEAL . . BY ALFRED DE VIGNY

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1899

920

5884

V. 3

4125-40

TO THE
LIBRARY OF THE
MUSEUM OF COMPARATIVE ZOOLOGY

Copyright, 1898, by
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The translations in this volume, where previously published, are used by arrangement with the owners of the copyrights (as specified at the beginning of each story). Translations made especially for the series are covered by its general copyright. All rights in both classes are reserved.



CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE HIDDEN MASTERPIECE..... Honoré de Balzac	11
THE SORROW OF AN OLD CONVICT Pierre Loti.....	57
THE MUMMY'S FOOT..... Théophile Gautier	65
FATHER AND SON..... Edouard Rod.....	87
LAURETTE OR THE RED SEAL..... Alfred de Vigny...	119


THE HIDDEN MASTERPIECE

BY

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

From "The Duchesse de Langeais," etc. Translated
by Katharine Prescott Wormeley. Published (in their
edition of Balzac's works) by Roberts Brothers.

Copyright, 1885, by Roberts Brothers.



THE HIDDEN MASTERPIECE

BY HONORÉ DE BALZAC

I.

ON a cold morning in December, towards the close of the year 1612, a young man, whose clothing betrayed his poverty, was standing before the door of a house in the Rue des Grands-Augustins, in Paris. After walking to and fro for some time with the hesitation of a lover who fears to approach his mistress, however complying she may be, he ended by crossing the threshold and asking if Maître François Porbus were within. At the affirmative answer of an old woman who was sweeping out one of the lower rooms, the young man slowly mounted the stairway, stopping from time to time and hesitating, like a newly-fledged courtier doubtful as to what sort of reception the king might grant him.

When he reached the upper landing of the spiral ascent, he paused a moment before laying hold of a grotesque knocker which ornamented the door of the *atelier*, where the famous painter

of Henry IV.—neglected by Marie de Medecis for Rubens—was probably at work. The young man felt the strong sensation which vibrates in the soul of great artists when, in the flush of youth and of their ardor for art, they approach a man of genius or a masterpiece. In all human sentiments there are, as it were, primeval flowers bred of noble enthusiasms, which droop and fade from year to year, till joy is but a memory and glory a lie. Amid such fleeting emotions nothing so resembles love as the young passion of an artist who tastes the first delicious anguish of his destined fame and woe,—a passion daring yet timid, full of vague confidence and sure discouragement. Is there a man, slender in fortune, rich in his springtime of genius, whose heart has not beaten loudly as he approached a master of his art? If there be, that man will for ever lack some heart-string, some touch, I know not what, of his brush, some fibre in his creations, some sentiment in his poetry. When braggarts, self-satisfied and in love with themselves, step early into the fame which belongs rightly to their future achievements, they are men of genius only in the eyes of fools. If talent is to be measured by youthful shyness, by that indefinable modesty which men born to glory lose in the practice of their art, as a pretty woman loses hers among the artifices of coquetry, then this unknown young man might claim to be possessed

of genuine merit. The habit of success lessens doubt; and modesty, perhaps, is doubt.

Worn down with poverty and discouragement, and dismayed at this moment by his own presumption, the young neophyte might not have dared to enter the presence of the master to whom we owe our admirable portrait of Henry IV., if chance had not thrown an unexpected assistance in his way. An old man mounted the spiral stairway. The oddity of his dress, the magnificence of his lace ruffles, the solid assurance of his deliberate step, led the youth to assume that this remarkable personage must be the patron, or at least the intimate friend, of the painter. He drew back into a corner of the landing and made room for the new-comer; looking at him attentively and hoping to find either the frank good-nature of the artistic temperament, or the serviceable disposition of those who promote the arts. But on the contrary he fancied he saw something diabolical in the expression of the old man's face,—something, I know not what, which has the quality of alluring the artistic mind.

Imagine a bald head, the brow full and prominent and falling with deep projection over a little flattened nose turned up at the end like the noses of Rabelais and Socrates; a laughing, wrinkled mouth; a short chin boldly chiselled and garnished with a gray beard cut into a point;

sea-green eyes, faded perhaps by age, but whose pupils, contrasting with the pearl-white balls on which they floated, cast at times magnetic glances of anger or enthusiasm. The face in other respects was singularly withered and worn by the weariness of old age, and still more, it would seem, by the action of thoughts which had undermined both soul and body. The eyes had lost their lashes, and the eyebrows were scarcely traced along the projecting arches where they belonged. Imagine such a head upon a lean and feeble body, surround it with lace of dazzling whiteness worked in meshes like a fish-slice, festoon the black velvet doublet of the old man with a heavy gold chain, and you will have a faint idea of the exterior of this strange individual, to whose appearance the dusky light of the landing lent fantastic coloring. You might have thought that a canvas of Rembrandt without its frame had walked silently up the stairway, bringing with it the dark atmosphere which was the sign-manual of the great master. The old man cast a look upon the youth which was full of sagacity; then he rapped three times upon the door, and said, when it was opened by a man in feeble health, apparently about forty years of age, "Good-morning, maître."

Porbus bowed respectfully, and made way for his guest, allowing the youth to pass in at the same time, under the impression that he came

with the old man, and taking no further notice of him ; all the less perhaps because the neophyte stood still beneath the spell which holds a heaven-born painter as he sees for the first time an *atelier* filled with the materials and instruments of his art. Daylight came from a casement in the roof and fell, focussed, as it were, upon a canvas which rested on an easel in the middle of the room, and which bore, as yet, only three or four chalk lines. The light thus concentrated did not reach the dark angles of the vast *atelier* ; but a few wandering reflections gleamed through the russet shadows on the silvered breastplate of a horseman's cuirass of the fourteenth century as it hung from the wall, or sent sharp lines of light upon the carved and polished cornice of a dresser which held specimens of rare pottery and porcelains, or touched with sparkling points the rough-grained texture of ancient gold-brocaded curtains, flung in broad folds about the room to serve the painter as models for his drapery. Anatomical casts in plaster, fragments and torsos of antique goddesses amorously polished by the kisses of centuries, jostled each other upon shelves and brackets. Innumerable sketches, studies in the three crayons, in ink, and in red chalk, covered the walls from floor to ceiling ; color-boxes, bottles of oil and turpentine, easels and stools upset or standing at right angles, left but a narrow pathway to the circle of light thrown

from the window in the roof, which fell full on the pale face of Porbus and on the ivory skull of his singular visitor.

The attention of the young man was taken exclusively by a picture destined to become famous after those days of tumult and revolution, and which even then was precious in the sight of certain opinionated individuals to whom we owe the preservation of the divine afflatus through the dark days when the life of art was in jeopardy. This noble picture represents the Mary of Egypt as she prepares to pay for her passage by the ship. It is a masterpiece, painted for Marie de Medicis, and afterwards sold by her in the days of her distress.

"I like your saint," said the old man to Porbus, "and I will give you ten golden crowns over and above the queen's offer ; but as to entering into competition with her—the devil !"

"You do like her, then ?"

"As for that," said the old man, "yes, and no. The good woman is well set-up, but—she is not living. You young men think you have done all when you have drawn the form correctly, and put everything in place according to the laws of anatomy. You color the features with flesh-tones,—mixed beforehand on your palette,—taking very good care to shade one side of the face darker than the other ; and because you draw now and then from a nude woman stand-

ing on a table, you think you can copy nature ; you fancy yourselves painters, and imagine that you have got at the secret of God's creations ! Pr-r-r-r !— To be a great poet it is not enough to know the rules of syntax and write faultless grammar. Look at your saint, Porbus. At first sight she is admirable ; but at the very next glance we perceive that she is glued to the canvas, and that we cannot walk round her. She is a silhouette with only one side, a semblance cut in outline, an image that can't turn round nor change her position. I feel no air between this arm and the background of the picture ; space and depth are wanting. All is in good perspective ; the atmospheric gradations are carefully observed, and yet in spite of your conscientious labor I cannot believe that this beautiful body has the warm breath of life. If I put my hand on that firm, round throat I shall find it cold as marble. No, no, my friend, blood does not run beneath that ivory skin ; the purple tide of life does not swell those veins, nor stir those fibres which interlace like net-work below the translucent amber of the brow and breast. This part palpitates with life, but that other part is not living ; life and death jostle each other in every detail. Here, you have a woman ; there, a statue ; here again, a dead body. Your creation is incomplete. You have breathed only a part of your soul into the well-beloved work. The torch

of Prometheus went out in your hands over and over again ; there are several parts of your painting on which the celestial flame never shone."

" But why is it so, my dear master ? " said Porbus humbly, while the young man could hardly restrain a strong desire to strike the critic.

" Ah ! that is the question," said the little old man. " You are floating between two systems,—between drawing and color, between the patient phlegm and honest stiffness of the old Dutch masters and the dazzling warmth and abounding joy of the Italians. You have tried to follow, at one and the same time, Hans Holbein and Titian, Albrecht Dürer and Paul Veronese. Well, well ! it was a glorious ambition, but what is the result ? You have neither the stern attraction of severity nor the deceptive magic of the chiaroscuro. See ! at this place the rich, clear color of Titian has forced out the skeleton outline of Albrecht Dürer, as molten bronze might burst and overflow a slender mould. Here and there the outline has resisted the flood, and holds back the magnificent torrent of Venetian color. Your figure is neither perfectly well painted nor perfectly well drawn ; it bears throughout the signs of this unfortunate indecision. If you did not feel that the fire of your genius was hot enough to weld into one the rival methods, you ought to have chosen honestly the one or the other, and thus attained the unity which conveys one aspect, at least, of life. As

it is, you are true only on your middle plane. Your outlines are false; they do not round upon themselves; they suggest nothing behind them. There is truth here," said the old man, pointing to the bosom of the saint; "and here," showing the spot where the shoulder ended against the background; "but there," he added, returning to the throat, "it is all false. Do not inquire into the why and wherefore. I should fill you with despair."

The old man sat down on a stool and held his head in his hands for some minutes in silence.

"Master," said Porbus at length, "I studied that throat from the nude; but, to our sorrow, there are effects in nature which become false or impossible when placed on canvas."

"The mission of art is not to copy nature, but to represent it; you are not an abject copyist, but a poet," cried the old man, hastily interrupting Porbus with a despotic gesture. "If it were not so, a sculptor could reach the height of his art by merely moulding a woman. Try to mould the hand of your mistress, and see what you will get,—ghastly articulations, without the slightest resemblance to her living hand; you must have resource to the chisel of a man who, without servilely copying that hand, can give it movement and life. It is our mission to seize the mind, soul, countenance of things and beings. Effects! effects! what are they? the mere accidents of

the life, and not the life itself. A hand,—since I have taken that as an example,—a hand is not merely a part of the body, it is far more ; it expresses and carries on a thought which we must seize and render. Neither the painter nor the poet nor the sculptor should separate the effect from the cause, for they are indissolubly one. The true struggle of art lies there. Many a painter has triumphed through instinct without knowing this theory of art as a theory.

“Yes,” continued the old man vehemently, “you draw a woman, but you do not *see* her. That is not the way to force an entrance into the arcana of Nature. Your hand reproduces, without an action of your mind, the model you copied under a master. You do not search out the secrets of form, nor follow its windings and evolutions with enough love and perseverance. Beauty is solemn and severe, and cannot be attained in that way : we must wait and watch its times and seasons, and clasp and hold it firmly ere it yields to us. Form is a Proteus less easily captured, more skilful to double and escape, than the Proteus of fable ; it is only at the cost of struggle that we compel it to come forth in its true aspects. You young men are content with the first glimpse you get of it ; or, at any rate, with the second or the third. This is not the spirit of the great warriors of art,—invincible powers, not misled by will-o’-the-wisps, but ad-

vancing always until they force Nature to lie bare in her divine integrity. That was Raphael's method," said the old man, lifting his velvet cap in homage to the sovereign of art ; " his superiority came from the inward essence which seems to break from the inner to the outer of his figures. Form with him was what it is with us,—a medium by which to communicate ideas, sensations, feelings ; in short, the infinite poesy of being. Every figure is a world ; a portrait, whose original stands forth like a sublime vision, colored with the rainbow tints of light, drawn by the monitions of an inward voice, laid bare by a divine finger which points to the past of its whole existence as the source of its given expression. You clothe your women with delicate skins and glorious draperies of hair, but where is the blood which begets the passion or the peace of their souls, and is the cause of what you call 'effects' ? Your saint is a dark woman ; but this, my poor Porbus, belongs to a fair one. Your figures are pale, colored phantoms, which you present to our eyes ; and you call that painting ! art ! Because you make something which looks more like a woman than a house, you think you have touched the goal ; proud of not being obliged to write *currus venustus* or *pulcher homo* on the frame of your picture, you think yourself majestic artists like our great forefathers. Ha, ha ! you have not got there yet, my little men ; you will

use up many a crayon and spoil many a canvas before you reach that height. Undoubtedly a woman carries her head this way and her petticoats that way ; her eyes soften and droop with just that look of resigned gentleness ; the throbbing shadow of the eyelashes falls exactly thus upon her cheek. That is it, and—that is *not it*. What lacks? A mere nothing ; but that mere nothing is ALL. You have given the shadow of life, but you have not given its fulness, its being, its—I know not what—soul, perhaps, which floats vaporously about the tabernacle of flesh ; in short, that flower of life which Raphael and Titian culled. Start from the point you have now attained, and perhaps you may yet paint a worthy picture : you grew weary too soon. Mediocrity will extol your work ; but the true artist smiles. O Mabuse ! O my master !” added this singular person, “you were a thief ; you have robbed us of your life, your knowledge, your art ! But at least,” he resumed, after a pause, “this picture is better than the paintings of that rascally Rubens, with his mountains of Flemish flesh daubed with vermilion, his cascades of red hair, and his hurly-burly of color. At any rate, you have got the elements of color, drawing, and sentiment,—the three essential parts of art.”

“But the saint is sublime, good sir !” cried the young man in a loud voice, waking from a

deep reverie. "These figures, the saint and the boatman, have a subtle meaning which the Italian painters cannot give. I do not know one of them who could have invented that hesitation of the boatman."

"Does the young fellow belong to you?" asked Porbus of the old man.

"Alas, maître, forgive my boldness," said the neophyte, blushing. "I am all unknown; only a dauber by instinct. I have just come to Paris, that fountain of art and science."

"Let us see what you can do," said Porbus, giving him a red crayon and a piece of paper.

The unknown copied the saint with an easy turn of his hand.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed the old man, "what is your name?"

The youth signed the drawing: Nicolas Pous-sin.

"Not bad for a beginner," said the strange being who had discoursed so wildly. "I see that it is worth while to talk art before you. I don't blame you for admiring Porbus's saint. It is a masterpiece for the world at large; only those who are behind the veil of the holy of holies can perceive its errors. But you are worthy of a lesson, and capable of understanding it. I will show you how little is needed to turn that picture into a true masterpiece. Give all your eyes and all your attention; such a chance of instruction

may never fall in your way again. Your palette, Porbus."

Porbus fetched his palette and brushes. The little old man turned up his cuffs with convulsive haste, slipped his thumb through the palette charged with prismatic colors, and snatched, rather than took, the handful of brushes which Porbus held out to him. As he did so his beard, cut to a point, seemed to quiver with the eagerness of an incontinent fancy; and while he filled his brush he muttered between his teeth:

"Colors fit to fling out of the window with the man who ground them,—crude, false, revolting! who can paint with them?"

Then he dipped the point of his brush with feverish haste into the various tints, running through the whole scale with more rapidity than the organist of a cathedral runs up the gamut of the *O Filii* at Easter.

Porbus and Poussin stood motionless on either side of the easel, plunged in passionate contemplation.

"See, young man," said the old man without turning round, "see how with three or four touches and a faint bluish glaze you can make the air circulate round the head of the poor saint, who was suffocating in that thick atmosphere. Look how the drapery now floats, and you see that the breeze lifts it; just now it looked like heavy linen held out by pins. Observe that the

satiny lustre I am putting on the bosom gives it the plump suppleness of the flesh of a young girl. See how this tone of mingled reddish-brown and ochre warms up the cold grayness of that large shadow where the blood seemed to stagnate rather than flow. Young man, young man! what I am showing you now no other master in the world can teach you. Mabuse alone knew the secret of giving life to form. Mabuse had but one pupil, and I am he. I never took a pupil, and I am an old man now. You are intelligent enough to guess at what should follow from the little that I shall show you to-day."

While he was speaking, the extraordinary old man was giving touches here and there to all parts of the picture. Here two strokes of the brush, there one, but each so telling that together they brought out a new painting,—a painting steeped, as it were, in light. He worked with such passionate ardor that the sweat rolled in great drops from his bald brow; and his motions seemed to be jerked out of him with such rapidity and impatience that the young Poussin fancied a demon, incased within the body of this singular being, was working his hands fantastically like those of a puppet without, or even against, the will of their owner. The unnatural brightness of his eyes, the convulsive movements which seemed the result of some mental resistance, gave to this fancy of the youth a semblance of

truth which reacted upon his lively imagination. The old man worked on, muttering half to himself, half to his neophyte :

“Paf! paf! paf! that is how we butter it on, young man. Ah! my little pats, you are right; warm up that icy tone. Come, come!—pon, pon, pon—” he continued, touching up the spots where he had complained of a lack of life, hiding under layers of color the conflicting methods, and regaining the unity of tone essential to an ardent Egyptian.

“Now see, my little friend, it is only the last touches of the brush that count for anything. Porbus put on a hundred; I have only put on one or two. Nobody will thank us for what is underneath, remember that!”

At last the demon paused; the old man turned to Porbus and Poussin, who stood mute with admiration, and said to them :

“It is not yet equal to my Beautiful Nut-girl; still, one can put one’s name to such a work. Yes, I will sign it,” he added, rising to fetch a mirror in which to look at what he had done. “Now let us go and breakfast. Come, both of you, to my house. I have some smoked ham and good wine. Hey! hey! in spite of the degenerate times we will talk painting; we are strong ourselves. Here is a little man,” he continued, striking Nicolas Poussin on the shoulder, “who has the faculty.”

Observing the shabby cap of the youth, he pulled from his belt a leathern purse from which he took two gold-pieces and offered them to him, saying :

“ I buy your drawing.”

“ Take them,” said Porbus to Poussin, seeing that the latter trembled and blushed with shame, for the young scholar had the pride of poverty ; “ take them, he has the ransom of two kings in his pouch.”

The three left the *atelier* and proceeded, talking all the way of art, to a handsome wooden house standing near the Pont Saint-Michel, whose window-casings and arabesque decoration amazed Poussin. The embryo painter soon found himself in one of the rooms on the ground floor seated, beside a good fire, at a table covered with appetizing dishes, and, by unexpected good fortune, in company with two great artists who treated him with kindly attention.

“ Young man,” said Porbus, observing that he was speechless, with his eyes fixed on a picture, “ do not look at that too long, or you will fall into despair.”

It was the Adam of Mabuse, painted by that wayward genius to enable him to get out of the prison where his creditors had kept him so long. The figure presented such fulness and force of reality that Nicolas Poussin began to comprehend the meaning of the bewildering talk of the

old man. The latter looked at the picture with a satisfied but not enthusiastic manner, which seemed to say, "I have done better myself."

"There is life in the form," he remarked. "My poor master surpassed himself there; but observe the want of truth in the background. The man is living, certainly; he rises and is coming towards us; but the atmosphere, the sky, the air that we breathe, see, feel,—where are they? Besides, that is only a man; and the being who came first from the hand of God must needs have had something divine about him which is lacking here. Mabuse said so himself, with vexation, in his sober moments."

Poussin looked alternately at the old man and at Porbus with uneasy curiosity. He turned to the latter as if to ask the name of their host, but the painter laid a finger on his lips with an air of mystery, and the young man, keenly interested, kept silence, hoping that sooner or later some word of the conversation might enable him to guess the name of the old man, whose wealth and genius were sufficiently attested by the respect which Porbus showed him, and by the marvels of art heaped together in the picturesque apartment.

Poussin, observing against the dark panelling of the wall a magnificent portrait of a woman, exclaimed aloud, "What a beautiful Giorgione!"

"No," remarked the old man, "that is only one of my early daubs."

"Zounds!" cried Poussin naïvely; "are you the king of painters?"

The old man smiled, as if long accustomed to such homage. "Maître Frenhofer," said Porbus, "could you order up a little of your good Rhine wine for me?"

"Two casks," answered the host; "one to pay for the pleasure of looking at your pretty sinner this morning, and the other as a mark of friendship."

"Ah! if I were not so feeble," resumed Porbus, "and if you would consent to let me see your Beautiful Nut-girl, I too could paint some lofty picture, grand and yet profound, where the forms should have the living life."

"Show my work!" exclaimed the old man, with deep emotion. "No, no! I have still to bring it to perfection. Yesterday, towards evening, I thought it was finished. Her eyes were liquid, her flesh trembled, her tresses waved—she breathed! And yet, though I have grasped the X secret of rendering on a flat canvas the relief and roundness of nature, this morning at dawn I saw many errors. Ah! to attain that glorious result, I have studied to their depths the masters of color. I have analyzed and lifted, layer by layer, the colors of Titian, king of light. Like him, great sovereign of art, I have sketched my figure

in light, clear tones of supple yet solid color; for shadow is but an accident,—remember that, young man. Then I worked backward, as it were; and by means of half-tints, and glazings whose transparency I kept diminishing little by little, I was able to cast strong shadows deepening almost to blackness. The shadows of ordinary painters are not of the same texture as their tones of light. They are wood, brass, iron, anything you please except flesh in shadow. We feel that if the figures changed position the shady places could not be wiped off, and would remain dark spots which never could be made luminous. I have avoided that blunder, though many of our most illustrious painters have fallen into it. In my work you will see whiteness beneath the opacity of the broadest shadow. Unlike the crowd of ignoramuses, who fancy they draw correctly because they can paint one good vanishing line, I have not dryly outlined my figures, nor brought out superstitiously minute anatomical details; for, let me tell you, the human body does not end off with a line. In that respect sculptors get nearer to the truth of nature than we do. Nature is all curves, each wrapping or overlapping another. To speak rigorously, there is no such thing as drawing. Do not laugh, young man; no matter how strange that saying seems to you, you will understand the reasons for it one of these days. A line is a means by which man

explains to himself the effect of light upon a given object ; but there is no such thing as a line in nature, where all things are rounded and full. It is only in modelling that we really draw,—in other words, that we detach things from their surroundings and put them in their due relief. The proper distribution of light can alone reveal the whole body. For this reason I do not sharply define lineaments ; I diffuse about their outline a haze of warm, light half-tints, so that I defy any one to place a finger on the exact spot where the parts join the groundwork of the picture. If seen near by this sort of work has a woolly effect, and is wanting in nicety and precision ; but go a few steps off and the parts fall into place ; they take their proper form and detach themselves,—the body turns, the limbs stand out, we feel the air circulating around them.

“Nevertheless,” he continued sadly, “I am not satisfied ; there are moments when I have my doubts. Perhaps it would be better not to sketch a single line. I ask myself if I ought not to grasp the figure first by its highest lights, and then work down to the darker portions. Is not that the method of the sun, divine painter of the universe ? O Nature, Nature ! who has ever caught thee in thy flights ? Alas ! the heights of knowledge, like the depths of ignorance, lead to unbelief. I doubt my work.”

The old man paused, then resumed : " For ten years I have worked, young man ; but what are ten short years in the long struggle with Nature ? We do not know the time it cost Pygmalion to make the only statue that ever walked — "

He fell into a reverie and remained, with fixed eyes, oblivious of all about him, playing mechanically with his knife.

" See, he is talking to his own soul," said Porbus in a low voice.

The words acted like a spell on Nicolas Poussin, filling him with the inexplicable curiosity of a true artist. The strange old man, with his white eyes fixed in stupor, became to the wondering youth something more than a man ; he seemed a fantastic spirit inhabiting an unknown sphere, and waking by its touch confused ideas within the soul. We can no more define the moral phenomena of this species of fascination than we can render in words the emotions excited in the heart of an exile by a song which recalls his fatherland. The contempt which the old man affected to pour upon the noblest efforts of art, his wealth, his manners, the respectful deference shown to him by Porbus, his work guarded so secretly,—a work of patient toil, a work no doubt of genius, judging by the head of the Virgin which Poussin had so naïvely admired, and which, beautiful beside even the Adam of Mabuse, betrayed the imperial touch of a great artist,—in

short, everything about the strange old man^x seemed beyond the limits of human nature. The rich imagination of the youth fastened upon the one perceptible and clear clue to the mystery of this supernatural being,—the presence of the artistic nature, that wild, impassioned nature to which such mighty powers have been confided, which too often abuses those powers, and drags cold reason and common souls, and even lovers of art, over stony and arid places, where for such there is neither pleasure nor instruction; while to the artistic soul itself,—that white-winged angel of sportive fancy,—epics, works of art, and visions rise along the way. It is a nature, an essence, mocking yet kind, fruitful though destitute. Thus, for the enthusiastic Poussin, the old man became by sudden transfiguration Art itself,—art with all its secrets, its transports, and its dreams.

“Yes, my dear Porbus,” said Frenhofer, speaking half in revery, “I have never yet beheld a perfect woman; a body whose outlines were faultless and whose flesh-tints— Ah! where lives she?” he cried, interrupting his own words; “where lives the lost Venus of the ancients, so long sought for, whose scattered beauty we snatch by glimpses? Oh! to see for a moment, a single moment, the divine completed nature,—the ideal,—I would give my all of fortune. Yes; I would search thee out, celestial Beauty! in thy

farthest sphere. Like Orpheus, I would go down to hell to win back the life of art—”

“Let us go,” said Porbus to Poussin; “he neither sees nor hears us any longer.”

“Let us go to his *atelier*,” said the wonder-struck young man.

“Oh! the old dragon has guarded the entrance. His treasure is out of our reach. I have not waited for your wish or urging to attempt an assault on the mystery.”

“Mystery! then there is a mystery?”

“Yes,” answered Porbus. “Frenhofer was the only pupil Mabuse was willing to teach. He became the friend, saviour, father of that unhappy man, and he sacrificed the greater part of his wealth to satisfy the mad passions of his master. In return, Mabuse bequeathed to him the secret of relief, the power of giving life to form,—that flower of nature, our perpetual despair, which Mabuse had seized so well that once, having sold and drunk the value of a flowered damask which he should have worn at the entrance of Charles V., he made his appearance in a paper garment painted to resemble damask. The splendor of the stuff attracted the attention of the emperor, who, wishing to compliment the old drunkard, laid a hand upon his shoulder and discovered the deception. Frenhofer is a man carried away by the passion of his art; he sees above and beyond what other painters see. He has meditated

deeply on color and the absolute truth of lines ; but by dint of much research, much thought, much study, he has come to doubt the object for which he is searching. In his hours of despair he fancies that drawing does not exist, and that lines can render nothing but geometric figures. That, of course, is not true ; because with a black line which has no color we can represent the human form. This proves that our art is made up, like nature, of an infinite number of elements. Drawing gives the skeleton, and color gives the life ; but life without the skeleton is a far more incomplete thing than the skeleton without the life. But there is a higher truth still, —namely, that practice and observation are the essentials of a painter ; and that if reason and poesy persist in wrangling with the tools, the brushes, we shall be brought to doubt, like Frenhofer, who is as much excited in brain as he is exalted in art. A sublime painter, indeed ; but he had the misfortune to be born rich, and that enables him to stray into theory and conjecture. Do not imitate him. Work ! work ! painters should theorize with their brushes in their hands.”

“We will contrive to get in,” cried Poussin, not listening to Porbus, and thinking only of the hidden masterpiece.

Porbus smiled at the youth’s enthusiasm, and bade him farewell with a kindly invitation to come and visit him.

Nicolas Poussin returned slowly towards the Rue de la Harpe and passed, without observing that he did so, the modest hostelry where he was lodging. Returning presently upon his steps, he ran up the miserable stairway with anxious rapidity until he reached an upper chamber nestling between the joists of a roof *en colombage*,—the plain, slight covering of the houses of old Paris. Near the single and gloomy window of the room sat a young girl, who rose quickly as the door opened, with a gesture of love; she had recognized the young man's touch upon the latch.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"It is—it is," he cried, choking with joy, "that I feel myself a painter! I have doubted it till now; but to-day I believe in myself. I can be a great man. Ah, Gillette, we shall be rich, happy! There is gold in these brushes!"

Suddenly he became silent. His grave and earnest face lost its expression of joy; he was comparing the immensity of his hopes with the mediocrity of his means. The walls of the garret were covered with bits of paper on which were crayon sketches; he possessed only four clean canvases. Colors were at that time costly, and the poor gentleman gazed at a palette that was well-nigh bare. In the midst of this poverty he felt within himself an indescribable wealth of heart and the superabundant force of consuming genius. Brought to Paris by a gentleman of his

acquaintance, and perhaps by the monition of his own talent, he had suddenly found a mistress,—one of those generous and noble souls who are ready to suffer by the side of a great man ; espousing his poverty, studying to comprehend his caprices, strong to bear deprivation and bestow love, as others are daring in the display of luxury and in parading the insensibility of their hearts. The smile which flickered on her lips brightened as with gold the darkness of the garret and rivalled the effulgence of the skies ; for the sun did not always shine in the heavens, but she was always here,—calm and collected in her passion, living in his happiness, his griefs ; sustaining the genius which overflowed in love ere it found in art its destined expression.

“ Listen, Gillette ; come ! ”

The obedient, happy girl sprang lightly on the painter’s knee. She was all grace and beauty, pretty as the springtime, decked with the wealth of feminine charm, and lighting all with the fire of a noble soul.

“ O God ! ” he exclaimed, “ I can never tell her ! ”

“ A secret ! ” she cried ; “ then I must know it.”

Poussin was lost in thought.

“ Tell me.”

“ Gillette, poor, beloved heart ! ”

“ Ah, do you want something of me ? ”

"Yes."

"If you want me to pose as I did the other day," she said, with a little pouting air, "I will not do it. Your eyes say nothing to me, then. You look at me, but you do not think of me."

"Would you like me to copy another woman?"

"Perhaps," she answered, "if she were very ugly."

"Well," continued Poussin, in a grave tone, "if to make me a great painter it were necessary to pose to some one else—"

"You are testing me," she interrupted; "you know well that I would not do it."

Poussin bent his head upon his breast like a man succumbing to joy or grief too great for his spirit to bear.

"Listen," she said, pulling him by the sleeve of his worn doublet, "I told you, Nick, that I would give my life for you; but I never said—never!—that I, a living woman, would renounce my love."

"Renounce it?" cried Poussin.

"If I showed myself thus to another you would love me no longer; and I myself, I should feel unworthy of your love. To obey your caprices, ah, that is simple and natural! in spite of myself, I am proud and happy in doing thy dear will; but to another, fy!"

"Forgive me, my own Gillette," said the painter, throwing himself at her feet. "I would rather

be loved than famous. To me thou art more precious than fortune and honors. Yes, away with these brushes ! burn those sketches ! I have been mistaken. My vocation is to love thee,—thee alone ! I am not a painter, I am thy lover. Perish art and all its secrets !”

She looked at him admiringly, happy and captivated by his passion. She reigned ; she felt instinctively that the arts were forgotten for her sake, and flung at her feet like grains of incense.

“ Yet he is only an old man,” resumed Poussin. “ In you he would see only a woman. You are the perfect woman whom he seeks.”

“ Love should grant all things !” she exclaimed, ready to sacrifice love’s scruples to reward the lover who thus seemed to sacrifice his art to her. “ And yet,” she added, “ it would be my ruin. Ah, to suffer for thy good ! Yes, it is glorious ! But thou wilt forget me. How came this cruel thought into thy mind ?”

“ It came there, and yet I love thee,” he said, with a sort of contrition. “ Am I, then, a wretch ?”

“ Let us consult Père Hardouin.”

“ No, no ! it must be a secret between us.”

“ Well, I will go ; but thou must not be present,” she said. “ Stay at the door, armed with thy dagger. If I cry out, enter and kill the man.”

Forgetting all but his art, Poussin clasped her in his arms.

"He loves me no longer!" thought Gillette, when she was once more alone.

She regretted her promise. But before long she fell a prey to an anguish far more cruel than her regret; and she struggled vainly to drive forth a terrible fear which forced its way into her mind. She felt that she loved him less as the suspicion rose in her heart that he was less worthy than she had thought him.

II.

THREE months after the first meeting of Porbus and Poussin, the former went to see Maître Frenhofer. He found the old man a prey to one of those deep, self-developed discouragements, whose cause, if we are to believe the mathematicians of health, lies in a bad digestion, in the wind, in the weather, in some swelling of the intestines, or else, according to casuists, in the imperfections of our moral nature; the fact being that the good man was simply worn out by the effort to complete his mysterious picture. He was seated languidly in a large oaken chair of vast dimensions covered with black leather; and without changing his melancholy attitude he cast on Porbus the distant glance of a man sunk in absolute dejection.

"Well, maître," said Porbus, "was the ultramarine, for which you journeyed to Brussels,

worthless? Are you unable to grind our new white? Is the oil bad, or the brushes restive?"

"Alas!" cried the old man, "I thought for one moment that my work was accomplished; but I must have deceived myself in some of the details. I shall have no peace until I clear up my doubts. I am about to travel; I go to Turkey, Asia, Greece, in search of models. I must compare my picture with various types of Nature. It may be that I have up *there*," he added, letting a smile of satisfaction flicker on his lip, "Nature herself. At times I am half afraid that a breath may wake this woman, and that she will disappear from sight."

He rose suddenly, as if to depart at once. "Wait," exclaimed Porbus. "I have come in time to spare you the costs and fatigues of such a journey."

"How so?" asked Frenhofer, surprised.

"Young Poussin is beloved by a woman whose incomparable beauty is without imperfection. But, my dear master, if he consents to lend her to you, at least you must let us see your picture."

The old man remained standing, motionless, in a state bordering on stupefaction. "What!" he at last exclaimed, mournfully. "Show my creature, my spouse?—tear off the veil with which I have chastely hidden my joy? It would be prostitution! For ten years I have lived with this woman; she is mine, mine alone! she loves

me! Has she not smiled upon me as, touch by touch, I painted her? She has a soul,—the soul with which I endowed her. She would blush if other eyes than mine beheld her. Let her be seen?—where is the husband, the lover, so debased as to lend his wife to dishonor? When you paint a picture for the court you do not put your whole soul into it; you sell to courtiers your tricked-out lay-figures. My painting is not a picture; it is a sentiment, a passion! Born in my *atelier*, she must remain a virgin there. She shall not leave it unclothed. Poesy and women give themselves bare, like truth, to lovers only. Have we the model of Raphael, the Angelica of Ariosto, the Beatrice of Dante? No, we see but their semblance. Well, the work which I keep hidden behind bolts and bars is an exception to all other art. It is not a canvas; it is a woman,—a woman with whom I weep and laugh and think and talk. Would you have me resign the joy of ten years, as I might throw away a worn-out doublet? Shall I, in a moment, cease to be father, lover, creator?—this woman is not a creature; she is my creation. Bring your young man; I will give him my treasures,—paintings of Correggio, Michel-Angelo, Titian; I will kiss the print of his feet in the dust,—but make him my rival? Shame upon me! Ha! I am more a lover than I am a painter. I shall have the strength to burn my Nut-girl ere I render my last

sigh ; but suffer her to endure the glance of a man, a young man, a painter ?—No, no ! I would kill on the morrow the man who polluted her with a look ! I would kill you,—you, my friend,—if you did not worship her on your knees ; and think you I would submit my idol to the cold eyes and stupid criticisms of fools ? Ah, love is a mystery ! its life is in the depths of the soul ; it dies when a man says, even to his friend, Here is she whom I love.”

The old man seemed to renew his youth ; his eyes had the brilliancy and fire of life, his pale cheeks blushed a vivid red, his hands trembled. Porbus, amazed by the passionate violence with which he uttered these words, knew not how to answer a feeling so novel and yet so profound. Was the old man under the thralldom of an artist’s fancy ? Or did these ideas flow from the unspeakable fanaticism produced at times in every mind by the long gestation of a noble work ? Was it possible to bargain with this strange and whimsical being ?

Filled with such thoughts, Porbus said to the old man, “ Is it not woman for woman ? Pousin lends his mistress to your eyes.”

“ What sort of mistress is that ? ” cried Frenhofer. “ She will betray him sooner or later. Mine will be to me for ever faithful.”

“ Well,” returned Porbus, “ then let us say no more. But before you find, even in Asia, a

woman as beautiful, as perfect, as the one I speak of, you may be dead, and your picture for ever unfinished."

"Oh, it is finished!" said Frenhofer. "Whoever sees it will find a woman lying on a velvet bed, beneath curtains; perfumes are exhaling from a golden tripod by her side: he will be tempted to take the tassels of the cord that holds back the curtain; he will think he sees the bosom of Catherine Lescaut,—a model called the Beautiful Nut-girl; he will see it rise and fall with the movement of her breathing. Yet—I wish I could be sure—"

"Go to Asia, then," said Porbus hastily, fancying he saw some hesitation in the old man's eye.

Porbus made a few steps towards the door of the room. At this moment Gillette and Nicolas Poussin reached the entrance of the house. As the young girl was about to enter, she dropped the arm of her lover and shrank back as if overcome by a presentiment. "What am I doing here?" she said to Poussin, in a deep voice, looking at him fixedly.

"Gillette, I leave you mistress of your actions; I will obey your will. You are my conscience, my glory. Come home; I shall be happy, perhaps, if you, yourself—"

"Have I a self when you speak thus to me? Oh, no! I am but a child. Come," she continued,

seeming to make a violent effort. "If our love perishes, if I put into my heart a long regret, thy fame shall be the guerdon of my obedience to thy will. Let us enter. I may yet live again, —a memory on thy palette."

Opening the door of the house the two lovers met Porbus coming out. Astonished at the beauty of the young girl, whose eyes were still wet with tears, he caught her all trembling by the hand and led her to the old master.

"There!" he cried; "is she not worth all the masterpieces in the world?"

Frenhofer quivered. Gillette stood before him in the ingenuous, simple attitude of a young Georgian, innocent and timid, captured by brigands and offered to a slave-merchant. A modest blush suffused her cheeks, her eyes were lowered, her hands hung at her sides, strength seemed to abandon her, and her tears protested against the violence done to her purity. Poussin cursed himself, and repented of his folly in bringing this treasure from their peaceful garret. Once more he became a lover rather than an artist; scruples convulsed his heart as he saw the eye of the old painter regain its youth and, with the artist's habit, disrobe as it were the beauteous form of the young girl. He was seized with the jealous frenzy of a true lover.

"Gillette!" he cried, "let us go."

At this cry, with its accent of love, his mistress

raised her eyes joyfully and looked at him ; then she ran into his arms.

"Ah ! you love me still?" she whispered, bursting into tears.

Though she had had strength to hide her suffering, she had none to hide her joy.

"Let me have her for one moment," exclaimed the old master, "and you shall compare her with my Catherine. Yes, yes ; I consent !"

There was love in the cry of Frenhofer as in that of Poussin, mingled with jealous coquetry on behalf of his semblance of a woman ; he seemed to revel in the triumph which the beauty of his virgin was about to win over the beauty of the living woman.

"Do not let him retract," cried Porbus, striking Poussin on the shoulder. "The fruits of love wither in a day ; those of art are immortal."

"Can it be," said Gillette, looking steadily at Poussin and at Porbus, "that I am nothing more than a woman to him?"

She raised her head proudly ; and as she glanced at Frenhofer with flashing eyes, she saw her lover gazing once more at the picture he had formerly taken for a Giorgione.

"Ah !" she cried, "let us go in ; he never looked at me like that !"

"Old man !" said Poussin, roused from his meditation by Gillette's voice, "see this sword. I will plunge it into your heart at the first cry of

that young girl. I will set fire to your house, and no one shall escape from it. Do you understand me ? ”

His look was gloomy and the tones of his voice were terrible. His attitude, and above all the gesture with which he laid his hand upon the weapon, comforted the poor girl, who half forgave him for thus sacrificing her to his art and to his hopes of a glorious future.

Porbus and Poussin remained outside the closed door of the *atelier*, looking at one another in silence. At first the painter of the Egyptian Mary uttered a few exclamations : “ Ah, she unclothes herself ! ” — “ He tells her to stand in the light ! ” — “ He compares them ! ” but he grew silent as he watched the mournful face of the young man ; for though old painters have none of such petty scruples in presence of their art, yet they admire them in others, when they are fresh and pleasing. The young man held his hand on his sword, and his ear seemed glued to the panel of the door. Both men, standing darkly in the shadow, looked like conspirators waiting the hour to strike a tyrant.

“ Come in ! come in ! ” cried the old man, beaming with happiness. “ My work is perfect ; I can show it now with pride. Never shall painter, brushes, colors, canvas, light, produce the rival of Catherine Lescaut, the Beautiful Nut-girl.”

Porbus and Poussin, seized with wild curiosity, rushed into the middle of a vast *atelier* filled with dust, where everything lay in disorder, and where they saw a few paintings hanging here and there upon the walls. They stopped before the figure of a woman, life-sized and half-nude, which filled them with eager admiration.

"Do not look at that," said Frenhofer, "it is only a daub which I made to study a pose; it is worth nothing. Those are my errors," he added, waving his hand towards the enchanting compositions on the walls around them.

At these words Porbus and Poussin, amazed at the disdain which the master showed for such marvels of art, looked about them for the secret treasure, but could see it nowhere.

"There it is!" said the old man, whose hair fell in disorder about his face, which was scarlet with supernatural excitement. His eyes sparkled, and his breast heaved like that of a young man beside himself with love.

"Ah!" he cried, "you did not expect such perfection? You stand before a woman, and you are looking for a picture! There are such depths on that canvas, the air within it is so true, that you are unable to distinguish it from the air you breathe. Where is art? Departed, vanished! Here is the form itself of a young girl. Have I not caught the color, the very

life of the line which seems to terminate the body? The same phenomenon which we notice around fishes in the water is also about objects which float in air. See how these outlines spring forth from the background. Do you not feel that you could pass your hand behind those shoulders? For seven years have I studied these effects of light coupled with form. That hair,—is it not bathed in light? Why, she breathes! That bosom,—see! Ah! who would not worship it on bended knee? The flesh palpitates! Wait, she is about to rise; wait!”

“Can you see anything?” whispered Poussin to Porbus.

“Nothing. Can you?”

“No.”

The two painters drew back, leaving the old man absorbed in ecstasy, and tried to see if the light, falling plumb upon the canvas at which he pointed, had neutralized all effects. They examined the picture, moving from right to left, standing directly before it, bending, swaying, rising by turns.

“Yes, yes; it is really a canvas,” cried Frenhofer, mistaking the purpose of their examination. “See, here is the frame, the easel; these are my colors, my brushes.” And he caught up a brush which he held out to them with a naïve motion.

“The old rogue is making game of us,” said

Poussin, coming close to the pretended picture. "I can see nothing here but a mass of confused color, crossed by a multitude of eccentric lines, making a sort of painted wall."

"We are mistaken. See!" returned Porbus.

Coming nearer, they perceived in a corner of the canvas the point of a naked foot, which came forth from the chaos of colors, tones, shadows, hazy and undefined, misty and without form,—an enchanting foot, a living foot. They stood lost in admiration before this glorious fragment breaking forth from the incredible, slow, progressive destruction around it. The foot seemed to them like the torso of some Grecian Venus, brought to light amid the ruins of a burned city.

"There is a woman beneath it all!" cried Porbus, calling Poussin's attention to the layers of color which the old painter had successively laid on, believing that he thus brought his work to perfection. The two men turned towards him with one accord, beginning to comprehend, though vaguely, the ecstasy in which he lived.

"He means it in good faith," said Porbus.

"Yes, my friend," answered the old man, rousing from his abstraction, "we need faith; faith in art. We must live with our work for years before we can produce a creation like that. Some of these shadows have cost me endless toil. See, there on her cheek, below the eyes, a faint half-shadow; if you observed it in Nature

you might think it could hardly be rendered. Well, believe me, I took unheard-of pains to reproduce that effect. My dear Porbus, look attentively at my work, and you will comprehend what I have told you about the manner of treating form and outline. Look at the light on the bosom, and see how by a series of touches and higher lights firmly laid on I have managed to grasp light itself, and combine it with the dazzling whiteness of the clearer tones; and then see how, by an opposite method,—smoothing off the sharp contrasts and the texture of the color,—I have been able, by caressing the outline of my figure and veiling it with cloudy half-tints, to do away with the very idea of drawing and all other artificial means, and give to the form the aspect and roundness of Nature itself. Come nearer, and you will see the work more distinctly; if too far off it disappears. See! there, at that point, it is, I think, most remarkable.” And with the end of his brush he pointed to a spot of clear light color.

Porbus struck the old man on the shoulder, turning to Poussin as he did so, and said, “Do you know that he is one of our greatest painters?”

“He is a poet even more than he is a painter,” answered Poussin gravely.

“There,” returned Porbus, touching the canvas, “is the ultimate end of our art on earth.”

"And from thence," added Poussin, "it rises, to enter heaven."

"How much happiness is there!—upon that canvas," said Porbus.

The absorbed old man gave no heed to their words; he was smiling at his visionary woman.

"But sooner or later he will perceive that there is nothing there," cried Poussin.

"Nothing there!—upon my canvas?" said Frenhofer, looking first at the two painters, and then at his imaginary picture.

"What have you done?" cried Porbus, addressing Poussin.

The old man seized the arm of the young man violently, and said to him, "You see nothing?—clown, infidel, scoundrel, dolt! Why did you come here? My good Porbus," he added, turning to his friend, "is it possible that you, too, are jesting with me? Answer; I am your friend. Tell me, can it be that I have spoiled my picture?"

Porbus hesitated, and feared to speak; but the anxiety painted on the white face of the old man was so cruel that he was constrained to point to the canvas and utter the word, "See!"

Frenhofer looked at his picture for the space of a moment, and staggered.

"Nothing! nothing! after toiling ten years!"

He sat down and wept.

"Am I then a fool, an idiot? Have I neither

talent nor capacity? Am I no better than a rich man who walks, and can only walk? Have I indeed produced nothing?"

He gazed at the canvas through tears. Suddenly he raised himself proudly and flung a lightning glance upon the two painters.

"By the blood, by the body, by the head of Christ, you are envious men who seek to make me think she is spoiled, that you may steal her from me. I—I see her!" he cried. "She is wondrously beautiful!"

At this moment Poussin heard the weeping of Gillette as she stood, forgotten, in a corner.

"What troubles thee, my darling?" asked the painter, becoming once more a lover.

"Kill me!" she answered. "I should be infamous if I still loved thee, for I despise thee. I admire thee; but thou hast filled me with horror. I love, and yet already I hate thee."

While Poussin listened to Gillette, Frenhofer drew a green curtain before his Catherine, with the grave composure of a jeweller locking his drawers when he thinks that thieves are near him. He cast at the two painters a look which was profoundly dissimulating, full of contempt and suspicion; then, with convulsive haste, he silently pushed them through the door of his *atelier*. When they reached the threshold of his house he said to them, "Adieu, my little friends."

The tone of this farewell chilled the two painters with fear.

On the morrow Porbus, alarmed, went again to visit Frenhofer, and found that he had died during the night, after having burned his paintings.

THE SORROW OF AN OLD
CONVICT

BY
PIERRE LOTI

From "The Book of Pity and of Death." Translated
by T. P. O'Connor. Published by the
Cassell Publishing Co.

Copyright, 1892, by Cassell Publishing Co.

THE SORROW OF AN OLD CONVICT

BY PIERRE LOTI

THIS is a little story which was told me by Yves. It happened one evening when he had gone into the Roads to carry in his gunboat a cargo of convicts to the transport vessel which was to take them to New Caledonia.

Among them was a very old convict (seventy at least), who carried with him very tenderly a poor sparrow in a small cage.

Yves, to pass the time, had entered into conversation with this old fellow, who had not, it appears, a bad face, but who was tied by his chain to a young gentleman—ignoble-looking, sneering, with the glasses of the short-sighted on a small, pale nose.

An old highwayman arrested for the fifth or sixth time for vagabondage and robbery, he said he was. "How can a man avoid stealing when he has once commenced, and when he has no trade whatever, and when people won't have anything to do with him anywhere? He must, must n't he? My last sentence was for a sack of

potatoes which I took in a field with a wagoner's whip and a pumpkin. Might n't they have allowed me to die in France, I ask you, instead of sending me down there, old as I am?" . . .

And then, quite happy at finding that somebody was willing to listen to him with sympathy, he showed to Yves his most precious possession in the world, the little cage and the sparrow.

The sparrow was quite tame, and knew his voice, and for more than a year had lived with him in his cell, perched on his shoulder. . . . Ah, it was not without trouble he had obtained permission to take it with him to New Caledonia, and then, he had besides to make for it a cage which would be suitable for the voyage, to procure some wood, a little old wire, and a little green paint to paint the whole and make it pretty.

Here I recall the very words of Yves. "Poor sparrow! It had for food in its cage a piece of that gray bread which is given in prisons, but it had the appearance of being quite happy, nevertheless. It jumped about just like any other bird."

Some hours afterward, when they reached the transport vessel and the convicts were about to embark for their long voyage, Yves, who had forgotten this old man, passed once more by chance near him.

"Here, take it," said the old man, with a voice that had altogether changed, holding out to him

his little cage, "I give it to you. You may, perhaps, find some use for it; perhaps it may give you pleasure."

"Certainly not," replied Yves. "On the contrary, you must take it with you. It will be your little comrade down there."

"Oh," replied the old man, "he is no longer inside. You did n't know that; you did n't hear then? He is no longer there," and two tears of indescribable misery ran down his cheeks.

Through a lurch of the vessel the door of the cage had opened; the sparrow took fright, flew out, and immediately fell into the sea because of its cut wing. Oh, what a moment of horrible grief to see it fight and die, swept away by the rapid current, and he all the time helpless to rescue it. At first, by a natural impulse, he wished to cry out for help; to address himself to Yves; to implore him. . . . But the impulse was immediately stopped by the recollection and consciousness of his personal degradation. An old wretch like him! Who would be ready to hear the prayer of such as he? Could he ever imagine that the ship would be stopped to fish up a drowning sparrow—the poor bird of a convict? The idea was absurd. Accordingly he remained silent in his place, looking at the little gray body as it disappeared on the foam of the sea, struggling to the end. He felt terribly lonely now, and for ever, and great tears of soli-

tary and supreme despair dimmed his eyes. Meantime, the young gentleman with the eye-glasses, his chain-fellow, laughed to see an old man weep.

Now that the bird was no longer there, he did not wish to preserve its cage, made with so much solicitude for the lonely dead bird. He offered it to this good soldier who had condescended to listen to his story, anxious to leave him this legacy before departing for his long and last voyage.

And Yves sadly had accepted the empty cage as a present, so that he might not cause any more pain to this old abandoned wretch by appearing to disdain this thing which had cost him so much labor.

I feel that I have not been able to do full justice to all the sadness that there was in this story as it was told me.

It was evening and very late, and I was about to go to bed. I, who had in the course of my life seen with little emotion so many loud-sounding sorrows and dramas and deaths, perceived with astonishment that the distress of this old man tore my heart, and even threatened to disturb my sleep.

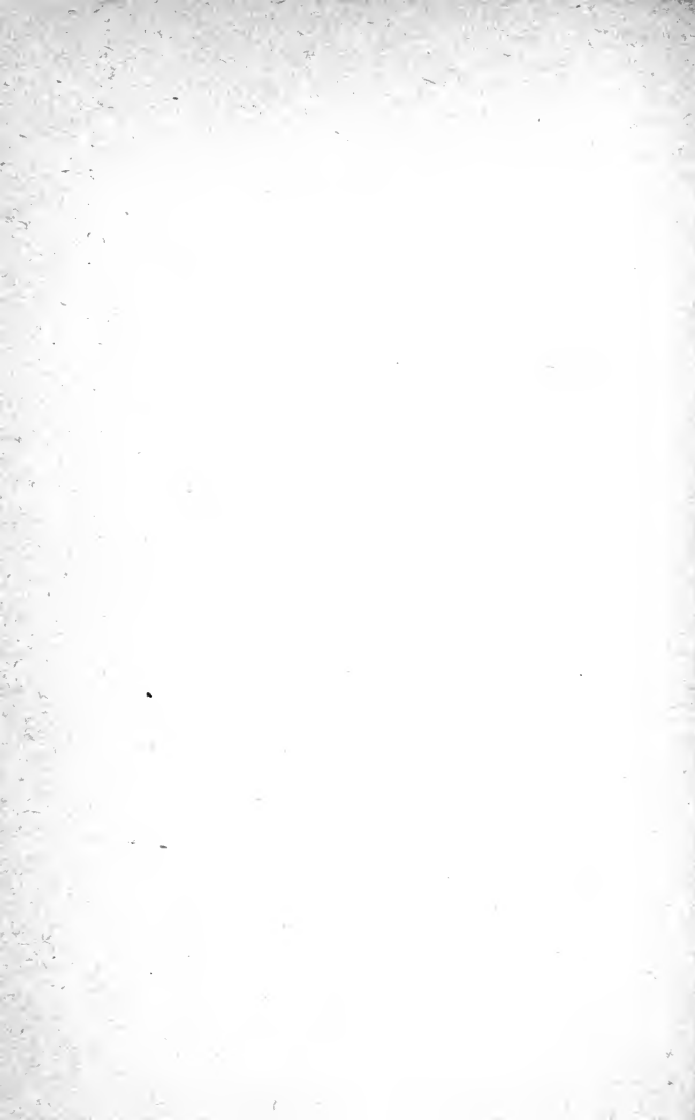
"I wonder," said I, "if means could be found of sending him another?"

"Yes," replied Yves, "I also thought of that. I thought of buying him a beautiful bird at a bird-

dealer's and bringing it back to him to-morrow with the little cage if there were time to do so before his departure. It would be a little difficult. Moreover, you are the only person who could go into the Roads to-morrow and go on board the transport to find out this old man; and I do not even know his name. And, then, would not people think it very odd?"

"Ah, yes, certainly. As to its being thought odd, there cannot be any mistake about that." And for a moment I dwelt with pleasure upon the idea, laughing that good inner laugh which scarcely appears upon the surface.

However, I did not follow up the project, and the following morning when I awoke, and with the first impression gone, the thing appeared to me childish and ridiculous. This disappointment was not one of those which a mere plaything could console. The poor old convict, all alone in the world—the most beautiful bird in Paradise would never replace for him the humble gray little sparrow with cut wing, reared on prison bread, who had been able to awake once more in him a tenderness infinitely sweet, and to draw tears from a heart that was hardened and half-dead.



THE MUMMY'S FOOT
BY
THEOPHILE GAUTIER

From "One of Cleopatra's Nights." Translated by
Lafcadio Hearn. Published by Hurst & Co.

Copyright, 1890, by the Worthington Co.

THE MUMMY'S FOOT

BY THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

I HAD entered, in an idle mood, the shop of one of those curiosity-venders, who are called *marchands de bric-à-brac* in that Parisian *argot* which is so perfectly unintelligible elsewhere in France.

You have doubtless glanced occasionally through the windows of some of these shops, which have become so numerous now that it is fashionable to buy antiquated furniture, and that every petty stockbroker thinks he must have his *chambre au moyen âge*.

There is one thing there which clings alike to the shop of the dealer in old iron, the wareroom of the tapestry-maker, the laboratory of the chemist, and the studio of the painter:—in all those gloomy dens where a furtive daylight filters in through the window-shutters, the most manifestly ancient thing is dust;—the cobwebs are more authentic than the guimp laces; and the old pear-tree furniture on exhibition is actually younger than the mahogany which arrived but yesterday from America.

The warehouse of my *bric-à-brac* dealer was a veritable Capharnaum ; all ages and all nations seemed to have made their rendezvous there ; an Etruscan lamp of red clay stood upon a Boule cabinet, with ebony panels, brightly striped by lines of inlaid brass ; a duchess of the court of Louis XV. nonchalantly extended her fawn-like feet under a massive table of the time of Louis XIII. with heavy spiral supports of oak, and carven designs of chimeras and foliage intermingled.

Upon the denticulated shelves of several sideboards glittered immense Japanese dishes with red and blue designs relieved by gilded hatching ; side by side with enamelled works by Bernard Palissy, representing serpents, frogs, and lizards in relief.

From disembowelled cabinets escaped cascades of silver-lustrous Chinese silks and waves of tinsel, which an oblique sunbeam shot through with luminous beads ; while portraits of every era, in frames more or less tarnished, smiled through their yellow varnish.

The striped breastplate of a damascened suit of Milanese armor glittered in one corner ; Loves and Nymphs of porcelain ; Chinese Grotesques, vases of *celadon* and crackle-ware ; Saxon and old Sèvres cups, encumbered the shelves and nooks of the apartment.

The dealer followed me closely through the

tortuous way contrived between the piles of furniture ; warding off with his hand the hazardous sweep of my coat-skirts ; watching my elbows with the uneasy attention of an antiquarian and a usurer.

It was a singular face, that of the merchant :—an immense skull, polished like a knee, and surrounded by a thin aureole of white hair, which brought out the clear salmon tint of his complexion all the more strikingly, lent him a false aspect of patriarchal *bonhomie*, counteracted, however, by the scintillation of two little yellow eyes which trembled in their orbits like two louis-d'or upon quicksilver. The curve of his nose presented an aquiline silhouette, which suggested the Oriental or Jewish type. His hands—thin, slender, full of nerves which projected like strings upon the finger-board of a violin, and armed with claws like those on the terminations of bats' wings—shook with senile trembling ; but those convulsively agitated hands became firmer than steel pincers or lobsters' claws when they lifted any precious article,—an onyx cup, a Venetian glass, or a dish of Bohemian crystal. This strange old man had an aspect so thoroughly rabbinical and cabalistic that he would have been burnt on the mere testimony of his face three centuries ago.

“Will you not buy something from me to-day, sir ? Here is a Malay krees with a blade undu-

lating like flame: look at those grooves contrived for the blood to run along, those teeth set backward so as to tear out the entrails in withdrawing the weapon,—it is a fine character of ferocious arm, and will look well in your collection: this two-handed sword is very beautiful,—it is the work of Josepe de la Hera; and this *coliche-marde*, with its fenestrated guard,—what a superb specimen of handicraft!”

“No; I have quite enough weapons and instruments of carnage;—I want a small figure, something which will suit me as a paper-weight; for I cannot endure those trumpery bronzes which the stationers sell, and which may be found on everybody’s desk.”

The old gnome foraged among his ancient wares, and finally arranged before me some antique bronzes,—so-called, at least; fragments of malachite; little Hindoo or Chinese idols,—a kind of poussah toys in jade-stone, representing the incarnations of Brahma or Vishnoo, and wonderfully appropriate to the very undivine office of holding papers and letters in place.

I was hesitating between a porcelain dragon, all constellated with warts,—its mouth formidable with bristling tusks and ranges of teeth,—and an abominable little Mexican fetish, representing the god Vitziliputzili *au naturel*, when I caught sight of a charming foot, which I at first took for a fragment of some antique Venus.

It had those beautiful ruddy and tawny tints that lend to Florentine bronze that warm living look so much preferable to the gray-green aspect of common bronzes, which might easily be mistaken for statues in a state of putrefaction : satiny gleams played over its rounded forms, doubtless polished by the amorous kisses of twenty centuries ; for it seemed a Corinthian bronze, a work of the best era of art,—perhaps moulded by Lysippus himself.

“ That foot will be my choice,” I said to the merchant, who regarded me with an ironical and saturnine air, and held out the object desired that I might examine it more fully.

I was surprised at its lightness ; it was not a foot of metal, but in sooth a foot of flesh,—an embalmed foot,—a mummy’s foot : on examining it still more closely the very grain of the skin, and the almost imperceptible lines impressed upon it by the texture of the bandages, became perceptible. The toes were slender and delicate, and terminated by perfectly formed nails, pure and transparent as agates ; the great toe, slightly separated from the rest, afforded a happy contrast, in the antique style, to the position of the other toes, and lent it an aerial lightness,—the grace of a bird’s foot ;—the sole, scarcely streaked by a few almost imperceptible cross lines, afforded evidence that it had never touched the bare ground, and had only come in contact

with the finest matting of Nile rushes, and the softest carpets of panther skin.

“Ha, ha!—you want the foot of the Princess Hermonthis,”—exclaimed the merchant, with a strange giggle, fixing his owlish eyes upon me—“ha, ha, ha!—for a paper-weight!—an original idea!—artistic idea! Old Pharaoh would certainly have been surprised had some one told him that the foot of his adored daughter would be used for a paper-weight after he had had a mountain of granite hollowed out as a receptacle for the triple coffin, painted and gilded,—covered with hieroglyphics and beautiful paintings of the Judgment of Souls,”—continued the queer little merchant, half audibly, as though talking to himself!

“How much will you charge me for this mummy fragment?”

“Ah, the highest price I can get; for it is a superb piece: if I had the match of it you could not have it for less than five hundred francs;—the daughter of a Pharaoh! nothing is more rare.”

“Assuredly that is not a common article; but, still, how much do you want? In the first place let me warn you that all my wealth consists of just five louis: I can buy anything that costs five louis, but nothing dearer;—you might search my vest pockets and most secret drawers without even finding one poor five-franc piece more.”

“Five louis for the foot of the Princess Her-

monthis ! that is very little, very little indeed ; 't is an authentic foot," muttered the merchant, shaking his head, and imparting a peculiar rotary motion to his eyes. "Well, take it, and I will give you the bandages into the bargain," he added, wrapping the foot in an ancient damask rag—'very fine ! real damask—Indian damask which has never been redyed ; it is strong, and yet it is soft," he mumbled, stroking the frayed tissue with his fingers, through the trade-acquired habit which moved him to praise even an object of so little value that he himself deemed it only worth the giving away.

He poured the gold coins into a sort of mediæval alms-purse hanging at his belt, repeating :

"The foot of the Princess Hermonthis, to be used for a paper-weight !"

Then turning his phosphorescent eyes upon me, he exclaimed in a voice strident as the crying of a cat which has swallowed a fish-bone :

"Old Pharaoh will not be well pleased ; he loved his daughter,—the dear man !"

"You speak as if you were a contemporary of his : you are old enough, goodness knows ! but you do not date back to the Pyramids of Egypt," I answered, laughingly, from the threshold.

I went home, delighted with my acquisition.

With the idea of putting it to profitable use as soon as possible, I placed the foot of the divine

Princess Hermonthis upon a heap of papers scribbled over with verses, in themselves an undecipherable mosaic work of erasures; articles freshly begun; letters forgotten, and posted in the table drawer instead of the letter-box,—an error to which absent-minded people are peculiarly liable. The effect was charming, *bizarre*, and romantic.

Well satisfied with this embellishment, I went out with the gravity and pride becoming one who feels that he has the ineffable advantage over all the passers-by whom he elbows, of possessing a piece of the Princess Hermonthis, daughter of Pharaoh.

I looked upon all who did not possess, like myself, a paper-weight so authentically Egyptian, as very ridiculous people; and it seemed to me that the proper occupation of every sensible man should consist in the mere fact of having a mummy's foot upon his desk.

Happily I met some friends, whose presence distracted me in my infatuation with this new acquisition: I went to dinner with them; for I could not very well have dined with myself.

When I came back that evening, with my brain slightly confused by a few glasses of wine, a vague whiff of Oriental perfume delicately titillated my olfactory nerves: the heat of the room had warmed the natron, bitumen, and myrrh in which the *paraschistes*, who cut open

the bodies of the dead, had bathed the corpse of the princess ;—it was a perfume at once sweet and penetrating,—a perfume that four thousand years had not been able to dissipate.

The Dream of Egypt was Eternity : her odors have the solidity of granite, and endure as long.

I soon drank deeply from the black cup of sleep : for a few hours all remained opaque to me ; Oblivion and Nothingness inundated me with their sombre waves.

Yet light gradually dawned upon the darkness of my mind ; dreams commenced to touch me softly in their silent flight.

The eyes of my soul were opened ; and I beheld my chamber as it actually was ; I might have believed myself awake, but for a vague consciousness which assured me that I slept, and that something fantastic was about to take place.

The odor of the myrrh had augmented in intensity : and I felt a slight headache, which I very naturally attributed to several glasses of champagne that we had drunk to the unknown gods and our future fortunes.

I peered through my room with a feeling of expectation which I saw nothing to justify : every article of furniture was in its proper place ; the lamp, softly shaded by its globe of ground crystal, burned upon its bracket ; the water-color

sketches shone under their Bohemian glass ; the curtains hung down languidly ; everything wore an aspect of tranquil slumber.

After a few moments, however, all this calm interior appeared to become disturbed ; the wood-work cracked stealthily ; the ash-covered log suddenly emitted a jet of blue flame ; and the disks of the pateras seemed like great metallic eyes, watching, like myself, for the things which were about to happen.

My eyes accidentally fell upon the desk where I had placed the foot of the Princess Hermonthis.

Instead of remaining quiet—as behooved a foot which had been embalmed for four thousand years,—it commenced to act in a nervous manner ; contracted itself, and leaped over the papers like a startled frog ;—one would have imagined that it had suddenly been brought into contact with a galvanic battery : I could distinctly hear the dry sound made by its little heel, hard as the hoof of a gazelle.

I became rather discontented with my acquisition, inasmuch as I wished my paper-weights to be of a sedentary disposition, and thought it very unnatural that feet should walk about without legs ; and I commenced to experience a feeling closely akin to fear.

Suddenly I saw the folds of my bed-curtain stir ; and heard a bumping sound, like that caused

by some person hopping on one foot across the floor. I must confess I became alternately hot and cold ; that I felt a strange wind chill my back ; and that my suddenly rising hair caused my nightcap to execute a leap of several yards.

The bed-curtains opened and I beheld the strangest figure imaginable before me.

It was a young girl of a very deep coffee-brown complexion, like the bayadere Amani, and possessing the purest Egyptian type of perfect beauty : her eyes were almond-shaped and oblique, with eyebrows so black that they seemed blue ; her nose was exquisitely chiselled, almost Greek in its delicacy of outline ; and she might indeed have been taken for a Corinthian statue of bronze, but for the prominence of her cheek-bones and the slightly African fulness of her lips, which compelled one to recognize her as belonging beyond all doubt to the hieroglyphic race which dwelt upon the banks of the Nile.

Her arms, slender and spindle-shaped, like those of very young girls, were encircled by a peculiar kind of metal bands and bracelets of glass beads ; her hair was all twisted into little cords ; and she wore upon her bosom a little idol-figure of green paste, bearing a whip with seven lashes, which proved it to be an image of Isis : her brow was adorned with a shining plate of gold ; and a few traces of paint relieved the coppery tint of her cheeks.

As for her costume, it was very odd indeed.

Fancy a *pagne* or skirt all formed of little strips of material bedizened with red and black hieroglyphics, stiffened with bitumen, and apparently belonging to a freshly unbandaged mummy.

In one of those sudden flights of thought so common in dreams I heard the hoarse falsetto of the *bric-à-brac* dealer, repeating like a monotonous refrain the phrase he had uttered in his shop with so enigmatical an intonation :

“ Old Pharaoh will not be well pleased : he loved his daughter, the dear man ! ”

One strange circumstance, which was not at all calculated to restore my equanimity, was that the apparition had but one foot ; the other was broken off at the ankle !

She approached the table where the foot was starting and fidgeting about more than ever, and there supported herself upon the edge of the desk. I saw her eyes fill with pearly-gleaming tears.

Although she had not as yet spoken, I fully comprehended the thoughts which agitated her : she looked at her foot—for it was indeed her own—with an exquisitely graceful expression of coquettish sadness ; but the foot leaped and ran hither and thither, as though impelled on steel springs.

Twice or thrice she extended her hand to seize it, but could not succeed.

Then commenced between the Princess Hermonthis and her foot—which appeared to be endowed with a special life of its own—a very fantastic dialogue in a most ancient Coptic tongue, such as might have been spoken thirty centuries ago in the syrxes of the land of Ser : luckily, I understood Coptic perfectly well that night.

The Princess Hermonthis cried, in a voice sweet and vibrant as the tones of a crystal bell :

“ Well, my dear little foot, you always flee from me ; yet I always took good care of you. I bathed you with perfumed water in a bowl of alabaster ; I smoothed your heel with pumice-stone mixed with palm oil ; your nails were cut with golden scissors and polished with a hippopotamus tooth ; I was careful to select *tatbebs* for you, painted and embroidered and turned up at the toes, which were the envy of all the young girls in Egypt : you wore on your great toe rings bearing the device of the sacred Scarabæus ; and you supported one of the lightest bodies that a lazy foot could sustain.”

The foot replied, in a pouting and chagrined tone :

“ You know well that I do not belong to myself any longer ;—I have been bought and paid for ; the old merchant knew what he was about ; he bore you a grudge for having refused to espouse him ;—this is an ill turn which he has done

you. The Arab who violated your royal coffin in the subterranean pits of the necropolis of Thebes was sent thither by him : he desired to prevent you from being present at the reunion of the shadowy nations in the cities below. Have you five pieces of gold for my ransom ? ”

“ Alas, no !—my jewels, my rings, my purses of gold and silver, were all stolen from me,” answered the Princess Hermonthis, with a sob.

“ Princess,” I then exclaimed, “ I never retained anybody’s foot unjustly ;—even though you have not got the five louis which it cost me, I present it to you gladly : I should feel unutterably wretched to think that I were the cause of so amiable a person as the Princess Hermonthis being lame.”

I delivered this discourse in a royally gallant, troubadour tone, which must have astonished the beautiful Egyptian girl.

She turned a look of deepest gratitude upon me ; and her eyes shone with bluish gleams of light.

She took her foot—which surrendered itself willingly this time—like a woman about to put on her little shoe, and adjusted it to her leg with much skill.

This operation over, she took a few steps about the room, as though to assure herself that she was really no longer lame.

" Ah, how pleased my father will be !—he who was so unhappy because of my mutilation, and who from the moment of my birth set a whole nation at work to hollow me out a tomb so deep that he might preserve me intact until that last day, when souls must be weighed in the balance of Amenthi ! Come with me to my father ;—he will receive you kindly ; for you have given me back my foot."

I thought this proposition natural enough. I arrayed myself in a dressing-gown of large-flowered pattern, which lent me a very Pharaonic aspect ; hurriedly put on a pair of Turkish slippers, and informed the Princess Hermonthis that I was ready to follow her.

Before starting, Hermonthis took from her neck the little idol of green paste, and laid it on the scattered sheets of paper which covered the table.

" It is only fair," she observed smilingly, " that I should replace your paper-weight."

She gave me her hand, which felt soft and cold, like the skin of a serpent ; and we departed.

We passed for some time with the velocity of an arrow through a fluid and grayish expanse, in which half-formed silhouettes flitted swiftly by us, to right and left.

For an instant we saw only sky and sea.

A few moments later obelisks commenced to

tower in the distance : pylons and vast flights of steps guarded by sphinxes became clearly outlined against the horizon.

We had reached our destination.

The princess conducted me to the mountain of rose-colored granite, in the face of which appeared an opening—so narrow and low that it would have been difficult to distinguish it from the fissures in the rock, had not its location been marked by two stelæ wrought with sculptures.

Hermonthis kindled a torch, and led the way before me.

We traversed corridors hewn through the living rock : their walls, covered with hieroglyphics and paintings of allegorical processions, might well have occupied thousands of arms for thousands of years in their formation ;—these corridors, of interminable length, opened into square chambers, in the midst of which pits had been contrived, through which we descended by cramp-irons or spiral stairways ;—these pits again conducted us into other chambers, opening into other corridors, likewise decorated with painted sparrow-hawks, serpents coiled in circles, the symbols of the *tau* and *pedum*,—prodigious works of art which no living eye can ever examine,—interminable legends of granite which only the dead have time to read through all eternity.

At last we found ourselves in a hall so vast, so enormous, so immeasurable, that the eye could

not reach its limits; files of monstrous columns stretched far out of sight on every side, between which twinkled livid stars of yellowish flame;—points of light which revealed further depths incalculable in the darkness beyond.

The Princess Hermonthis still held my hand, and graciously saluted the mummies of her acquaintance.

My eyes became accustomed to the dim twilight, and objects became discernible.

I beheld the kings of the subterranean races seated upon thrones,—grand old men, though dry, withered, wrinkled like parchment, and blackened with naphtha and bitumen,—all wearing *pshents* of gold, and breastplates and gorgets glittering with precious stones; their eyes immovably fixed like the eyes of sphinxes, and their long beards whitened by the snow of centuries. Behind them stood their peoples, in the stiff and constrained posture enjoined by Egyptian art, all eternally preserving the attitude prescribed by the hieratic code. Behind these nations, the cats, ibixes, and crocodiles cotemporary with them,—rendered monstrous of aspect by their swathing bands,—mewed, flapped their wings, or extended their jaws in a saurian giggle.

All the Pharaohs were there—Cheops, Chephrenes, Psammetichus, Sesostris, Amenotaph—all the dark rulers of the pyramids and syringes:—on yet higher thrones sat Chronos and Xixou-

thros,—who was contemporary with the deluge ; and Tubal Cain, who reigned before it.

The beard of King Xixouthros had grown seven times around the granite table, upon which he leaned, lost in deep reverie,—and buried in dreams.

Further back, through a dusty cloud, I beheld dimly the seventy-two Pre-adamite Kings, with their seventy-two peoples—for ever passed away.

After permitting me to gaze upon this bewildering spectacle a few moments, the Princess Hermonthis presented me to her father Pharaoh, who favored me with a most gracious nod.

“ I have found my foot again !—I have found my foot ! ” cried the Princess, clapping her little hands together with every sign of frantic joy : “ it was this gentleman who restored it to me.”

The races of Kemi, the races of Nahasi,—all the black, bronzed, and copper-colored nations repeated in chorus :

“ The Princess Hermonthis has found her foot again ! ”

Even Xixouthros himself was visibly affected.

He raised his heavy eyelids, stroked his moustache with his fingers, and turned upon me a glance weighty with centuries.

“ By Oms, the dog of Hell, and Tmei, daughter of the Sun and of Truth ! this is a brave and worthy lad ! ” exclaimed Pharaoh, pointing to me

with his sceptre, which was terminated with a lotus-flower.

“What recompense do you desire?”

Filled with that daring inspired by dreams in which nothing seems impossible, I asked him for the hand of the Princess Hermonthis ;—the hand seemed to me a very proper antithetic recompense for the foot.

Pharaoh opened wide his great eyes of glass in astonishment at my witty request.

“What country do you come from? and what is your age?”

“I am a Frenchman; and I am twenty-seven years old, venerable Pharaoh.”

“——Twenty-seven years old! and he wishes to espouse the Princess Hermonthis, who is thirty centuries old!” cried out at once all the Thrones and all the Circles of Nations.

Only Hermonthis herself did not seem to think my request unreasonable.

“If you were even only two thousand years old,” replied the ancient King, “I would willingly give you the Princess; but the disproportion is too great; and, besides, we must give our daughters husbands who will last well: you do not know how to preserve yourselves any longer; even those who died only fifteen centuries ago are already no more than a handful of dust;—behold! my flesh is solid as basalt; my bones are bars of steel!

"I shall be present on the last day of the world, with the same body and the same features which I had during my lifetime : my daughter Hermonthis will last longer than a statue of bronze.

"Then the last particles of your dust will have been scattered abroad by the winds ; and even Isis herself, who was able to find the atoms of Osiris, would scarce be able to recompose your being.

"See how vigorous I yet remain, and how mighty is my grasp," he added, shaking my hand in the English fashion with a strength that buried my rings in the flesh of my fingers.

He squeezed me so hard that I awoke, and found my friend Alfred shaking me by the arm to make me get up.

"O you everlasting sleeper !—must I have you carried out into the middle of the street, and fireworks exploded in your ears ? It is after noon ; don't you recollect your promise to take me with you to see M. Aguado's Spanish pictures ?"

"God ! I forgot all, all about it," I answered, dressing myself hurriedly ; "we will go there at once ; I have the permit lying there on my desk."

I started to find it ;—but fancy my astonishment when I beheld, instead of the mummy's foot I had purchased the evening before, the little green paste idol left in its place by the Princess Hermonthis !

FATHER AND SON

BY

EDOUARD ROD

By arrangement with the author. The translation by
Elisabeth Luther Cary.

FATHER AND SON

BY EDOUARD ROD

I WAS worn out with an arduous and anxious day. Bad news had reached me from Brazil, where, at the moment, I had interests so important that a crisis might sweep under the house which I had founded with so much effort, the establishment of which had absorbed my youth. So the future seemed to me big with menace, and sharp disquietude kept gnawing at my heart, as I thought of three dear people whose destiny depended solely on my own,—my wife and my two little girls. Happy to-day amid plenty, they might on the morrow be sunk in poverty. Tranquilly ignorant of the danger hovering over them, they smiled upon me, and the sight of their smiling refreshed me. One is seldom sentimental in business, and I am not more so than others. I believe, in fact, that in apprehending misfortune, I realized for the first time how much I love the little human group of which I am the head, who give motive to my work, and whose loving joy rewards me for my trouble. They know nothing

of the battle in which I am engaged, of the blows I give and take, of the schemes I invent, and the anxieties that I endure for them, while they are occupied with the trivial tasks of their peaceful existence—directing the housekeeping, or learning lessons. Laurence and Juliette—twelve and ten—have dear faces, gentle and grave; both are blond, the elder is the more serious of the two, the younger is a shade more heedless—yet only a shade! I am well aware that Marguerite loves them better than she loves me: like so many other women, my dear wife lets herself be almost entirely conquered by maternity, and my share in her has come to be secondary. No matter! So it is and so it should be. I content myself with that part of her affection, knowing it to be warm and faithful. It is enough for me to be the keystone of that modest social edifice, a family; to maintain it in good condition, to keep it in repair, improve, and embellish it—that is my task and my delight. Affection is an indistinguishable cement, but it gives solidity to the walls. Do I manifest mine, profound as it is? Scarcely at all: I am sometimes surly, preoccupied, and cross. At such times Laurence will throw her arms about me and wheedle me like a little woman; Juliette, more easily disturbed, more sensitive and timid, watches me in silence. Marguerite bears sweetly with my unjust reproaches. Such womanly resignation is her lot, the reac-

tion she suffers from the wounds I receive in that field of battle without, of which she knows nothing.

That evening I was silent, to hide an uneasiness charged with emotion. At first I hardly replied to certain trifling questions from my wife. But Juliette chirped prettily, a dish that I like was served—a savory “stew” which our cook, who is from my part of the country, excels in preparing with certain special relishes.

Little by little my nerves relaxed and my mind grew calm under the influence of my comfortable surroundings. Just now in my office, reflection had shown me nothing but catastrophe close at hand, but here, in the peace of my abode, I gained confidence. Hackneyed arguments sufficed to drive away my anxiety—difficulties always turn out better than one expects. I have already passed successfully through similar crises—the worst seldom happens! The comforting warmth of a good glass of Bordeaux accentuated this better mood. I grew cheerful and commenced to talk of things and people as if the revolution in Brazil had never broken out. Just then a telegram was brought me. Immediately the tide of care swept over me anew, and I was conscious of trembling as I opened the despatch.

The emotion it aroused in me—a very different emotion from that which had shaken me since

morning—was so violent and so obvious that my wife, rising from the table and coming to me, said at once :

“What ails you ? What is the matter ? ”

“My father is very ill,” I replied, and repeated mechanically, “very ill ! ”

Juliette, who has a lively imagination and cannot bear to hear of illness, gave a little cry like a frightened bird, while Laurence asked :

“Grandpapa, what is the matter with him ? ”

“They give me no details,” I answered. “It is Aldouve who telegraphs, Aldouve, the gardener. I will go at once.”

I had hardly uttered these words when solicitude for my business interests seized me again. I drove it away, trying to persuade myself that my absence was possible, as during the day I had done all that I was able, and could not further influence events taking place at a distance. I consulted the time-table. A train would leave about ten o'clock.

“Do you wish me to go with you ? ” asked Marguerite. Surprise and compassion were in her kind, faithful eyes ; doubtless my emotion astonished her, for we seldom talked of my father.

“No,” I replied, “I will first go alone. You will do better to stay here. I will telegraph you if you are needed.”

The preparations were hurried through. Do

what I would my business cares regained possession of me. I thought rapidly of many things. I wrote three or four urgent letters. I entrusted to my wife a note containing divers directions for my head clerk. And all with that feverish agitation which unforeseen trouble provokes, when grief swoops down with fatal suddenness upon us, and we perceive the unexpected tokens of destiny.

All sorts of ideas jostled each other in my brain, obscuring the vision of suffering and death which had been called up by the telegram, so that in the confusion into which the news from my father had thrown me I hardly thought of him at all.

In the cab that took me to the Lyons station, a new wave of the tumultuous flood that was tossing me about brought his image before me, nor did the vision leave me. I had it all night for company as the train was speeding through the dark.

The last time I had seen my father—but could it be that this was many years ago? That visit to the old country home in which my childhood had been passed, and to which my father had welcomed me and my young family with jocund pleasure, came back to me by small degrees in its least details. I recalled him as he then was, tall, vigorous, solidly built, with roughly-hewn features softened by age, and by the whiten-

ing of his flat-lying hair and of his thick rough beard, which he wore full. He had the powerful body and strong head of an old countryman whom the seasons have strengthened as they strengthen the elms and the oaks. Up early, active, drinking freely of the light white wine of his own vineyards, eating with a lusty appetite of hams smoked in his own tall chimney and of savory vegetables from his garden, he was in the habit of saying :

“ I am cut out for a centenarian.”

He thought he was, and so did I. When one is sturdy and healthy, it is easy to believe it will last for ever ; then illness draws near, and its thin finger marks you with the irresistible sign, and there the man is—bending, shrivelling, dissolving, like a tree whose roots are dry, and whose wasted tissues must fall under the axe. It is a horrible universal drama, taking its cruel course throughout devastating time ; but we are conscious of it only when we are among the actors or victims.

That reunion lasted a fortnight. It was in September ; the peaches were ripening against the walls, the grapes were turning golden among the vines, and the sunsets were magnificent over the mountains on which snow had already begun to appear. My father took an extraordinary liking to my two little girls, who soon became his constant companions. They were everywhere

together, among the flower-beds where the last roses were blooming, under the apple trees weighted with their heavy harvest, and in the groves where dead leaves were already whirling.

They trotted off together, the old man between the two children, stopping, all of them, to smell a flower or pluck a fruit, while Muquet, the old mountain dog, one-eyed and tawny-coated, followed them, the plume of his tail erect. I would even find my father seated on a bench, a child on either knee, singing as he danced them up and down :

“Une poule sur un mur
Qui picote du pain dur.”

(A chicken on a wall, picking dry bread.)

Those were delightful days, affectionate, careless, joyous, friendly days. How soon they fled ! When the moment came for leaving, while our trunks were being piled on the stage that came to fetch us, my father, for an instant, was near breaking down. But he was a valiant old man who had learned from life the high virtue of resignation ; he straightened up to his great stature, steadied his glance, and smiled with a touch of bravado, so the farewells were gayly got through with—farewells, alas ! that might be for ever.

“Adieu, grandfather, adieu.”

“*Au revoir*, little ones, come again soon, eh ?”

“Yes, oh, yes, next year.”

“And you, father,” said my wife, “you are coming to spend a little time with us, are n’t you?”

“Certainly,—in the spring.”

Just at that word, I remember, the vehicle commenced to jolt along, and we turned to wave our handkerchiefs. A little later, as our train passed in front of the house, we waved again from the door, and my father responded from one of his windows. Was that the last time I was ever to see him! For he did not keep his promise and come to Paris. A man of the old school, jealously attached to his corner of the earth and to his habits, my father detested travel, where everything offended him; the scenery because it differed from that which for seventy years his eyes had looked upon, the people because he knew them neither by name nor family, the cooking because it was not like his own. I trembled to recall a former visit he had made us; one of perpetual discontent, during which he complained of the adulterated wine, of the unsalted bread, of the butter which smelt of margarine, of the narrow rooms, the noise in the streets, the concierge who looked at him crossly, the cook who certainly took toll on her marketing. I confess I dreaded a repetition of those painful experiences. They will never, alas! be repeated. The chain of habit, stronger even than the attraction of the children, kept him away; he did not come. —

The following year, instead of going back to

him, we were obliged, on Juliette's account, to go to the sea ; the year after to Centeret on my wife's account, then again to the sea. Each time I wrote him a word to postpone our promised visit until the next year. I believed what I said, and so time passed. Our thoughts, moreover, were far from him. At long intervals we exchanged the short letters that one writes from a sense of duty without having much to say. At bottom he and I were but two strangers, united by only a fragile bond : I was trying to shape my life, absorbed by difficulties that my father had never known : he, on his part, was rounding out his life in his little home among the fields, preoccupied with cultivating his land, and battling against phylloxera, oïdium, and mildew ; cared for by Josette and Joseph, his old servant and his gardener-coachman ; and sometimes diverted by visits from his neighbors. Thus separated, we had no need of one another, and I was astonished by the profound sentiment which the telegram just received had aroused in my heart ; the torture it had given me in that train of so slow a flight, to think that I should arrive perhaps too late, that the sight would have gone from his eyes, that the voice would have died on his lips, that he would pass away with strangers by his bedside.

One moment this grievous death-scene would possess my mind, the next it would be dissipated in the darkness like a nightmare that is over and

leaves you bruised, and other visions would rise about me, crowding memories of childhood and youth, faces and pictures etched in the book of memory. I recalled my father at different epochs, and seemed to see him among groups of people who looked blurred as through a heavy mist; I heard certain phrases that he used to be fond of repeating, with his own peculiar accent and the very sound of his voice. I went through the phases of feeling I had had for him. When I was little I was afraid of him, for he was often brusque to the point of violence, and there came before me the pale, delicate face of my mother, whose fragility suffered from these storms that swept over her, as a too fierce wind over a frail plant. But he changed from year to year; he softened as good wine mellows with age. What a faithful companion he was for me later, when I had become that insupportable being, a "young man!" Each summer I came to spend some weeks with him, and oh, how good the smile of his welcome! We used to stroll together through the neighboring woods, along the stream that runs the mill-wheel, among the bunches of meadow-sweet, whose pale clusters sway on slender stems. Often, also, of an evening we would go to the town and to the "Club," for a game of billiards. My father was very proud of me, Heaven knows why! and took pleasure in showing me to the old frequenters of the place, slow, grave men

who looked me over with slightly distrustful curiosity; methodical players, each of whom had his peculiarity. One, a very awkward man with a good, sunburnt face, and a grizzly goatee, would never let his ball go, without muttering despairingly, striking the floor with his cue, "A little too much to the right—a failure!" Another, long, thin, and bilious, could not miss a carom without crying, "No luck!" and greeted the successful shots of his adversaries with an envious, "What luck!" A third, a fat man, with a sleek face, and the look of a museum attendant, moved his lips while taking slow aim, as if he were mumbling a prayer, and followed the ball with his cue as if to continue directing its course. They were all worthy people who had known each other for years, and met each evening without tiring of each other, to exchange the same remarks over their ration of white wine, which was seldom varied. Those who did not play billiards played piquet. At ten o'clock the voice of the watchman was heard, according to the antiquated custom, calling out, "Ten o'clock! It has struck ten!" Then they hastened to finish their game, and went each to his home. How many happenings since that far time! Scarcely twenty years, and all that life passed away, all the waters of that stream which had united so many diverse elements and had borne one across so many imperceptible changes toward the unknown future.

In the *ego* of to-day how much endures of the *ego* of those dead times? I could not say. And as for the man once so strong, and so gleeful in winning his game, how much of him remains in the old man for whom the death-pang is lying in wait?

Meanwhile, the slope of memory declined farther and farther down the past. Some years—those that bridged the space between early infancy and youth—fled away as if their dust had left no trace. I saw my father again, still younger, more robust, and gruffer as well, surrounded by other faces, the features of which seemed half-effaced like those of old daguerreotypes. I recalled him as he looked on the night of a fire, protecting the house and the singed horses from the flames that were devouring the farm buildings, shouting out orders in a loud voice like a sea-captain in a tempest. I recalled another night, when, with head bent, and hands clasped behind him, and sighing heavily, he paced the room in a corner of which I crouched, terrified and trembling at being for the first time in the presence of death which had just swept my mother away from me. I felt on my forehead the scalding moisture of his tears as he took me in his arms, murmuring, “Poor little one! you do not know! You do not know!”

I heard his grumbling voice reproaching my grandmother, so kind and so wrinkled, who

never came near me without her hands filled with dainties, scolding her for her indulgence and reiterating his favorite phrase: "Leave the boy alone, mother, you'll make a girl of him!" And then the holidays, across which passed his high and sombre silhouette; the Christmas-tree sparkling with candles, or the reunions about the great table of a family now dispersed or dissolved, or the distribution of prizes, after which the rugged fatherly hand gently patted my cheek,—a thousand episodes familiar to us all, recurring almost alike in all lives at their beginning, however bitter or culpable they may become, with the same gay and simple charm.

And the train darted along, as swift as memory, among the black, invisible landscapes of the night. And the time thus filled with thoughts and dreams seemed to me infinitely slow in passing. I panted with eagerness to reach my father more quickly, to put my arms about him once more, to see the smile of greeting come into his eyes, to hear his words of welcome. As the night advanced this desire became more intense and despairing, aggravated into a sort of fever filled with ominous forebodings.

"I shall not see him again. . . . They sent me word too late! Ah! why did they, why did they!" And thus probing the secret depths of my heart, I discovered infinite affection which I had never known was there,—a world of love

which I had never had the leisure to explore.

Carried along on the current of my busy life, I had fancied myself characterized by great indifference, by a tenacious will and a dry heart. Ah, how mistaken I was! My life, which I dreamed was given essentially over to ambition, belonged, root and sap, to these dear people. Oh, what a poor man of business I was just then! My solicitude concerning operations that were under way, whose issue might destroy the structure of my fortune, gave place to that other solicitude which seemed to me a thousand times more important. Death, entering my circle, lighted it with a sudden illumination, and I perceived hidden things with the dazzlement of one passing abruptly, with quivering lids, out of darkness into light.

At dawn I was obliged to leave the express and wait at a junction for the local train which should bring me to my journey's end. Against a misty sky, filled with clouds, in the uncertain glimmering light, the silhouettes of the mountains softly massed themselves, surrounding with a vast amphitheatre the hideous buildings of the station, the long lines of empty cars, the idle locomotives. Near by some factory chimneys, tall and unsymmetrical, sent their smoke into the morning twilight. I freshened myself up, swallowed a cup of chocolate, and wandered out on

the platform among the peasants with their baskets. When I got into another car—one of those disjointed, slovenly cars used by local lines,—I was more hopeful and more serene. The torture of the night became less harassing. I let myself be diverted by the spectacle of the daybreak, by the appearance of the sun, climbing like a flame up the sky, by the coming of the countrymen to their tasks, stretching themselves out on the ground or straightening themselves up to interrogate space, shielding their eyes with the hand, by the flight of birds who rose at the passing of the train, by the farms that filed past us, humming with activity like bee-hives. Upon the going of the long night comes the renewal of cheerful, laborious life, forbidding men to lie back upon their griefs or their regrets, pushing them to healthful action, to salutary effort, leading them through mirages the whole unreality of which they never know. The human beings whom I saw scattered over the fields were like myself. They had fathers, wives, children, they loved them, lost them, mourned them,—and went on living as before. For all, the task of the day was the chief affair; grief might interrupt it for a moment—then it began again, with its cruel and wholesome exigency, engrossing strength, attention,—soul! And, after all, what could one wish better? Detached from this commonplace duty of providing for current needs, our souls

wander through space like lost birds; nothing guides them, nothing satisfies them, and such is our weakness, that to regulate their flight we must have this duty of gaining bit by bit our daily bread.

The train now stopped at petty stations, the names of which, called out by the employees, with a country accent, brought back another series of recollections. Between my twelfth and sixteenth years, my father was in the habit of taking me for a walk each Sunday, winter and summer, for health's sake he said. I was lazy about walking, and detested these excursions. But he would not give them up or let me escape them. Thus have I traversed the country with him, sometimes walking, sometimes driving, or else on this very railroad, the cars of which were never new, in order to reach a more distant station. In all these towns, scattered over the plain or perched on the lower buttresses of the Jura, my father had friends who welcomed us,—worthy people to whom I should have preferred comrades of my own age; or, perhaps we would stop at an inn to refresh ourselves with an omelette and a glass of white wine. I now recognized certain of those inns and hospitable homes, much the same as in old days, some of them a little more dilapidated, others renovated, and surrounded merely by thicker verdure; and I discovered also, in the depths of my memory, the

fragrance of the omelettes, and the flavor of the wine that my father used to taste critically—so proud of guessing its year ! Then suddenly, as if nearing a village, the train slackened speed before an old house of vaguely seigneurial aspect ; I recalled, as clear as sight, a young girl in a white gown, very blond and rosy, whom I had seen one of those Sundays, on the terrace of that house, seated in the shadow of hundred-year-old chestnut trees, and of whom I had dreamed. Ah ! how many such trifles embroider their little imperceptible dots on the canvas of life. How many minute recollections are engraved upon us so forcibly that time cannot efface them, and one may always find, under the strata of years, the pattern of their deep lines. While the hours thus filled were passing, they seemed irksome to me, and took their course without leaving any impression of delight. Now, from afar, they developed an unsuspected charm.

If I could only call them back, just as they were, for the moment needed to fix them again in mind !

If I could only pass along one of these roads, that interlace across the fields, skirting the farm walls, and running through clumps of trees or villages, I in my schoolboy blouse, my soul untarnished, my hand in my good father's hand !

It is a barren and cowardly prayer. I well know that nothing goes back to its beginning,

that no stream returns to its source ; that one must run with the years, and not be wasteful in regret for a past that no effort can regain.

Anxiety claimed me again as I caught sight of the station at the end of my sorrowful journey. With its *openwork* balcony running along its single story and its indented roof, it bears a specious resemblance to an Alpine chalet. A thick ivy grows luxuriantly along the walls. A very beautiful garden surrounds it : for the station-master is an ardent gardener, and with the modest plot of ground given over to him along the rails he has managed to make a charming flower-bed, whose old unfashionable flowers I used to love, —asters, dragon-flowers, balsams, china-asters, bleached dandelions ; flowers that have almost disappeared, driven out by the complicated inventions of fashionable horticulturists, and that now linger only in some old gardens like this one, where they make one think of ancient ladies playing upon the harpsichord.

This station-master, formerly an officer in Africa, stranded in this lost corner of the world after an adventurous youth of which certain episodes, distorted by tradition, are current through the countryside, was an original character, a "type" as we should say. I caught sight of him, aged, whitened, and his figure broken, as he passed in his gold-laced cap before the cars as they were opened. Formerly he had held his bell in his

hand, swinging it with a fine gesture of authority after making sure that all was right. Now having only to make signals to put in motion an electric arrangement of bells, he kept his hand swinging. I fancy no other change had come into the steady life of this rather unsociable old bachelor, who was a poet in his way and a thinker. He did not recognize me, perhaps because he did not take the trouble to look at me; these good country people who are so curious concerning each other are altogether indifferent to strangers. And I was now a stranger indeed, in a region the places of which had been pictured in my childish eyes, beside the old garden I had loved, and before the station that had been intermingled with so many of my memories.

My little bag in my hand, I proceeded toward my father's house.

It rose beside the road, a few moments distant from the little town whose silhouette was blocked out upon a hill. It is an old house to which belongs a farm, with farm buildings. It is two stories high, crude white, with a pent-roof, and green blinds. A beautiful ivy decorates one of the walls, while over the front climbs a singular flower, which my grandmother used to tell of having planted the first year of her married life. It is called the "Passion flower" because its pistils represent the Cross, the nails, and the crown of thorns in beautiful tints of limpid blue.

I do not know if it is a rare plant, but I have never seen it elsewhere ; my father used to tend it with restless care ; how much concern it has given him, and how many precautions he has taken to preserve it, through the terrible winters when the frost seared its poor stems and sought out even its roots under the earth. One year, indeed, it nearly perished. We were almost a house of mourning. But it recovered, and my father rejoiced as if some mysterious sign had promised him the continuance, after a crisis, of his race in vigorous life.

The blinds were opened wide to the balmy breezes of the morning, a ray of sunlight fell on the old roof, wrapping it in an atmosphere of luminous cheerfulness. Behind the wall of the inclosure rose the crests of apple trees in blossom—of fine old apple trees with regular branches, like bouquets arranged by a skilful hand. And the flight of birds streaked the air vibrating with their reiterated calls. How could one believe that near by, at that very moment, the last act of the drama of life was passing ? how was it possible that death could hover amid the sweetness and joy pervading everything ?

With a trembling heart, but still a little reassured by the smiling aspect of the place, I pulled the bell at the doorway. I waited for a long time. Heavy steps creaked on the gravel, and old Josette appeared, wrinkled as a blighted

apple, with locks of gray hair coming out from under her black cap. She threw up her hands, and straightway blurted out her familiar exclamation :

“Do tell! Mr. Paul, do tell!” Her astonishment still more reassured me.

“How is my father?” I asked. Instead of answering my question she cried again :

“How surprised monsieur will be! For you were not expected. Not that I should reproach you, Mr. Paul, but it is a long time since you have seen him! He talks of you continually. And when I say, ‘Why does n’t Mr. Paul come to see you,’ he answers, ‘It is business!’”

I interrupted her, repeating my question :

“But how is he?”

This time she replied :

“So, so, Mr. Paul, so, so. One day passable, the next day worse. There are times when he cannot get his breath. He coughs and coughs until he is blue. The doctor comes every morning to see how he is getting on.”

She spoke in an even tone, as if there were nothing alarming in these symptoms, with the calmness of one who cannot perceive, through the force of habit, the approach of death.

“Does he keep his bed?”

“*He* keep his bed! You do not know him, then. He will go to the last moment, I tell you. Gets up with the sun, like a young man. When

he can't keep around, he stays in his arm-chair, that's all. In the morning he gardens."

As I took a step forward, she stopped me :

"Wait till I go and prepare him. It might give him a shock to see you suddenly like that."

Josette preceded me, heavy, slow, and limping a little. I crossed the vestibule, then the kitchen where the copper of the stew-pan and "boilers" was shining, and waited in the dining-room. That was the room in which the family was oftenest used to gather, in former days. An old stove of decorated *faïence* heated it in winter ; pictures that I had all my life known, adorned the walls, old-fashioned pictures, contemporaneous with the romances of Louisa Paget, which they somewhat resembled : "The Penitent Brigand and his Son," "The Children of Edward," etc. I thought of the evenings under the lamp, so tranquil and so monotonous ; of the silent games of "Goose" that my father sometimes permitted me ; of the vanished faces I had seen about that table, now confused in the far depths of the past. The door opened. My father appeared, in a knitted jersey, shod with sabots, an old hat on his head.

"Ha ! It is you—"

In old times I was accustomed to his indifferent greeting—he detested demonstration, and there was, moreover, between us, that indefinable something that separates members of the same

family when they do not resemble one another, a sort of reciprocal distrust that paralyzes the impulses of affection. But this time his eyes smiled with a smile that I did not know, a smile of ample joy. Then suddenly he broke into tears, throwing his arms about me :

“ It is you—it is *you* !”

He had become small, withered, shrunken ; he felt little in my arms and light. He whom I had known so strong and powerful, robust as an oak, was but a poor yielding thing, fragile and flickering like a little candle flame one dares not breathe upon. His features were drawn and sharpened. His eyes looked glazed and retained only an uncertain expression of astonishment and discomfort. He dropped into his arm-chair, still weeping. And that was the rounding out of the revelation that for twelve hours had been unfolding to me the neglected mysteries of affection. He said :

“ Ah ! I am glad to see you—so glad !”

He asked about my family, and a glow of tenderness came into his eyes when he spoke the names of the two little girls. He recalled their words, their gestures, their attitudes, their artless ways, and plied me with a thousand questions :

“ Does Laurence still believe in Santa Claus ? Does Juliette still make those profound observations that used to amaze us ? Have they sometimes spoken of their grandfather ?” Then his

glance wandering, he was silent a moment, and, as if the better to awaken recollection of the delightful hours he was pondering on, he quavered :

“Une poule sur un mur.”

I was obliged to go over all the little round of our life for him, and I was vexed with myself for my ignorance of slight details which he himself, so far away, had almost guessed by sheer force of thinking about us.

Then suddenly he changed the conversation's course ; he spoke of himself, of his house, of his farmer who had given him some anxiety, of his vines which were suffering from mildew, of what he had done and what he counted on doing. From childhood I had known my father as a man of projects, enterprising, loving change and experiments. How many ingenious plans he had made for enlarging or embellishing his house, for augmenting the product of his farm, for battling against the enemies of trees, grain, and vine-stock ! Endowed to an exceptional degree with the spirit of initiative, he lacked as much all faculty of realization, so that his projects came to nothing. This time I was frightened by the abundance of the schemes that he commenced to develop for me in his poor, broken, panting voice. He was concerned about the construction of a veranda in front of the dining-room,

with enlarging the asparagus bed, with planting new trees—the pear and apple trees being old now, and worn out—the bark was splitting and they gave but mediocre harvest. To plant and build, build and plant—it is one of Nature's beneficent tricks to urge us toward remote aims when our strength is failing us. Thus she cradles us in supreme illusions, keeping out of our sight the frightful vision of the end that lies in wait for us. At her bidding the mirage of a thousand objects plays before us, exciting our desire,—objects that our desire is never to grasp. . . .

“Come with me and let me explain ! . . .”

With a revival of strength my father drew me into the garden, which we commenced to explore in every direction. He paused before some peach trees that were dying with two or three flowers on their branches.

“They should have been changed last year,” he said, “but I was not very well, I was not able to busy myself with the garden. This year I will fix all that !”

He rested his hand on the trunk of a pear tree, and said tenderly :

“That tree used to give famous pears. The ‘*beurrées grises*,’ you remember? But for two years it has not borne. It still blossoms a little, and then the fruit falls before it ripens. I see that it must be cut down—and that will hurt !”

He was animated, cheerful, vivacious, and like himself; so that I took comfort to myself, thinking, "They were too easily alarmed, they mistook an adventitious attack for fatal symptoms."

Yes, I tried to take comfort, and breathed again after the anguish of the journey, relieved of the burden of regret which had weighed so heavily on my heart.

The morning passed rapidly and almost gayly. The lovely April sun was climbing lightly upward in the heavens; the smell of sap was in the air; life surrounded us—that renewal of things that, each springtime, revives the illusion of their eternity. Toward eleven o'clock, my father suddenly recollected that he had given me nothing to eat, and was disconsolate. "You must be dying of hunger. Why did n't you speak?"

He would not believe that I could very well wait for lunch, which Josette announced even as we were debating.

"That settles the question," said I. And I inhaled the aroma of well-known dishes, the old country dishes, savory smoked sausages, cooked in a sort of pie, a fine cheese omelette, a "stew" made pungent with skilfully distributed herbs. With a trembling hand my father filled my glass, eulogizing, as he always used to, on his light wine:

"Just taste that for me, and tell me what you think of it! A little bit new; but it will be something famous!"

I noticed that he did not fill his own glass.

"How about you?"

He heaved a deep sigh.

"It is forbidden," he said. "The doctor pretends that it is n't good for me. What does the doctor know, after all? Just once, more's the pity, to your health!"

And he clicked his glass against mine, after pouring into it a few glistening drops of wine. Then he smacked his lips, with a critical approving air, and said:

"I'll send you a barrel when you are back in Paris. But you are going to stay awhile, aren't you?"

That simple question, although I had expected it, was enough rudely to reawaken the anxiety concerning my affairs which had been merged in the other anxiety. But there was such longing in my father's eyes, such supplicating desire, that I could not help replying:

"Oh, yes! certainly, until I am recalled."

He pondered a moment, his eyes rather vague, and after a little hesitation, asked me:

"What brought you anyway?"

I had expected that question also, but it troubled me. I began to explain.

"I had for a long time been promising myself

a turn in the country. I find myself a little tired. I am going to take a little vacation."

His penetrating eyes were on me ; he certainly could not believe me, he must be guessing the true cause of my coming. But he would take care not to show it. Driving away the importunate thought with a gesture of his hand, moving it across his face as if he were brushing off a fly, he murmured :

"Good, good, good."

Then I observed that he was not eating ; he would put a morsel on his plate, cut it up with his knife, taste it with a grimace, and scold Josette, who defended her cooking by grumbling :

"It is certainly because monsieur has no appetite !"

"I tell you that your butter was not fresh—and what a sauce!—a tasty sauce, indeed, and with a confoundedly bad taste !"

And I thought of his former scoldings that used to frighten me so, when I was little ; then he had a big voice, an abundant vocabulary, energetic gestures ; now he scolded gently, without authority, a little like a wayward child. It did not frighten his old servant, who bent to let the storm pass over her, and answered even when he commanded her to be silent. And, finally, he ended by smiling himself at his vain anger. I do not know why this little scene filled me with melancholy. I felt suddenly different, alien, lost

in that familiar house, as one might be in a place he had never seen before, made uneasy by the hours and days stretching before me to be filled. Ah ! too many things now separated me from my old father, from my distant past—too many things which had built up another soul within me ! Here I was no longer anything more than an uprooted tree, brought back to its native soil when the torn roots have long been dead. And I understood that verity, glimpses of which I had caught in those too rare hours when I had leisure for dreaming : that the only important thing in this life of ours—so difficult to live—is to maintain intact the sacred bonds that hold together the members of one family. We sacrifice too much to ambition ; we should live for our own people, in the place where we were born, near the blessed earth in which our ancestors are sleeping, and which will one day receive us. And I pictured to myself our life as it might have been, all united in this dear house, among these old belongings, about this patriarch, whom we would have wrapped in filial love. But I had turned aside to follow other paths, toward another destiny. My children would do as I had done. Thus actual life will have it, destroyer that it is of legitimate affection, enemy of all that is enduring,—a vortex that draws us in, and passes on. Doubtless, the reflection of these sombre thoughts was shown in my face, for my father,

observing me with secret solicitude, perceived it, and asked :

“What is it?”

I pleaded the fatigue of the journey.

“You did not sleep on the train?”

“No.”

“Hum! You must lie down for a while after dinner.”

This loving kindness kept me from pursuing my calculation as to when I could get back to my business; for my uneasiness had vanished on seeing my father animated almost to the point of alertness, and interesting himself in so many things, and with it had gone a little of my tenderness, which his goodness brought back. But now, suddenly, as we were rising from the table, he turned pale, trembled and fell back in his chair, his eyes turned up, his chest heaving violently in the effort to breathe. The attack was short; he came out of it exhausted and gasping, and I realized that I had not come much too soon, that through the familiar scenes of the morning death was approaching, swift, invisible, inexorable,—I saw it leaning over us, ready to take him from me for ever.

LAURETTE OR THE RED SEAL

BY

ALFRED DE VIGNY



LAURETTE OR THE RED SEAL

BY ALFRED DE VIGNY

I.—THE MEETING ON THE HIGHWAY.

THE road from Artois to Flanders is a long and dreary one. It extends in a straight line, with neither trees nor ditches along its sides, over flat plains, covered at all seasons with a yellow clay. It was in the month of March, 1815, that, as I was passing along this road, I met with an adventure I have never forgotten.

I was alone ; I rode on horseback ; I had a good cloak, a black casque, pistols, and a heavy sabre. It had been raining in torrents during four days and four nights of my journey, and I remember that I was singing the "Joconde" at the top of my voice—I was so young. The body-guard of the king, in 1814, was filled up with old men and boys ; the empire seemed to have seized and killed off all the men.

My comrades were on the road, somewhat in advance of me, escorting Louis XVIII. ; I saw their white cloaks and red coats on the very edge of the northern horizon. The Lancers of Bona-

parte, who, step by step, watched and followed our retreat, showed from time to time the tri-colored pennons of their long lances at the opposite horizon. A lost shoe had somewhat retarded my horse; but he was young and strong, and I pushed him on, to rejoin my squadron. He set off on a quick trot; I put my hand to my belt—it was well furnished with gold; I heard the iron scabbard of my sword clank upon my stirrup, and I felt very proud and perfectly happy.

It rained on, and I sang on. However, I soon ceased, tired of hearing nobody but myself, and I then heard only the rain and the feet of my horse as they plashed in the ruts. The pavement of the road gave way; I sank down; and was obliged to have recourse to my feet. My high cavalry boots were covered on the outside with a crust of mud, yellow as ochre, and inside they were fast filling with water. I looked at my new epaulettes, my happiness and my consolation—they were ruined by the rain. That was no slight affliction!

My horse hung his head, and I did the same. I began to reflect, and for the first time asked myself where I was going. I knew absolutely nothing about it; but that did not trouble me long; I knew that my squadron was there, and there too was my duty. As I felt in my heart a profound and imperturbable tranquillity, I thanked that ineffable feeling of *duty*, and tried to explain

it to myself. ✓ Seeing every day how gayly the most unaccustomed fatigues were borne by heads so fair or so white, how cavalierly a well-assured future was risked by men of a worldly and happy life, and taking my own share in that wonderful satisfaction which every man derives from the conviction that he cannot evade any of the obligations of honor, I saw clearly that *self-abnegation* ^{denial} was a far easier and more common thing than is generally imagined. ✕ I asked myself whether this abnegation of self was not an innate sentiment? what was this need of obeying, and of placing one's freedom of will in the hands of others, as a heavy and troublesome burden? whence came the secret pleasure of being rid of this burden? and why the pride of man never revolted at this? I perceived this mysterious instinct binding together, on every side, families and nations into masses powerful in their combination; but I nowhere saw the renunciation of one's own actions, words, wishes, and almost thoughts, so complete and formidable as in the army. ✓ In every direction I saw resistance possible and habitual. I beheld the citizen rendering an obedience that was discriminating and intelligent, examining for itself, and liable to stop at a certain point. I beheld even the tender submission of woman reach its limits, the law taking up her defence, when the authority she obeys commands a wrong. But military obe-

dience is blind and dumb, because[✓] at the same time passive and active—receiving its order and executing it—striking with eyes shut, like the Fate of antiquity. I followed out, through all its possible consequences, this *abnegation* of the soldier, without retreat, without condition, and leading him sometimes to tasks of illest omen. Such were my reflections as I walked on at my horse's own pleasure ; looking at my watch from time to time, and beholding the road as it stretched along for ever in a straight line, varied neither by house nor tree, and intersecting the plain as far as the horizon, like a yellow stripe on a gray cloth. ✓ Sometimes the liquid line was lost in the liquid ground that surrounded it ; and when a little brightening of the dull and pale light of the day spread over that most melancholy expanse of land, I saw myself in the midst of a muddy ocean, following a current of clay and plaster. ✓

Examining attentively the yellow line of the road, I observed upon it, at the distance of about a mile, a little black point, which was in motion. I was delighted with the sight,—it was somebody. I kept my eyes steadily fixed upon it. I saw that the black point was going in the same direction with myself, toward Lille, and that it went with a zigzag motion, as though with painful toil. I quickened my gait, and gained ground upon the object, which began to lengthen

a little and increase in bulk to my sight. Reaching a firmer soil, I resumed a trot, and soon fancied that I could distinguish a little black wagon. I was hungry, and hoped that it was the wagon of a sutler; and, looking upon my poor horse as a vessel, I crowded all sail to arrive at that fortunate island in this sea of mud, where he sometimes sank down above his knees.

When about a hundred yards off, I at last distinguished plainly a little wagon of white wood, covered by a black oilcloth stretched over three hoops. It looked like a little cradle mounted on two wheels. The wheels sank down to the axle-tree; the little mule which drew it was wearisomely led by a man on foot, who held the bridle. I drew near, and took an attentive look at him.

He was a man of about fifty, moustachioed, tall and strong, and his back rounded, like that of the old infantry officers who have carried the knapsack. He had also their uniform; and you could see, from under a short and well-worn blue cloak, the epaulette of a *chef-de-bataillon*. His face was rough and hard, but good, as you so often see in the army. He looked at me sideways from under his heavy black eyebrows, and drawing a musket quickly out of the wagon, he cocked it, passing to the other side of the mule, of which he thus made a rampart. Having seen his white cockade, I simply showed him the

sleeve of my red coat, when he replaced the musket in the wagon, saying :

"Oh ; that's another matter. I took you for one of those coneys who are running after us. Will you take a drop ?"

"With all my heart," I answered, drawing near ; "it is four-and-twenty hours since I have tasted one."

He had round his neck a cocoa-nut, beautifully carved, and made into a bottle, with a silver neck, of which he seemed a little vain. He reached it to me, and I drank a little poor white wine with a great deal of satisfaction, and returned him the cocoa-nut.

"To the health of the king !" said he, drinking ; "he has made me an officer of the Legion of Honor, and it is but right that I should follow him to the frontier. And as I have only my epaulette by which to live, I shall then rejoin my battalion. That's my duty."

As he thus spoke, to himself as it were, he set his little mule in march again, saying that we had no time to lose ; and as I was of the same opinion, I resumed my route two or three steps in his rear. I still kept looking at him, but without asking any questions, as I never liked that talkative indiscretion which is so common among us.

We went on in silence for about a mile. As he then stopped to rest his poor little mule,

which it was really painful to see, I halted too, and tried to press out the water which made my riding-boots like two reservoirs in which my legs were soaking.

"Your boots begin to stick to your feet?" said he to me.

"It is four nights since I have taken them off."

"Bah! in a week you will think no more of it," he replied, with his hoarse voice. "It is something to be alone in times like these, I can tell you. Do you know what I have got inside there?"

"No," said I.

"It is a woman."

"Ah!" was my answer, with no particular astonishment, as I quietly resumed my route at a walk again. He followed.

"This wretched covering here did not cost me very dear," he resumed, "nor the mule neither; but it is all that I need, although this road here is rather a long queue ribbon."

I offered him my horse to mount when he should be tired; and as I only spoke gravely and simply of his equipage, of which he feared the ridiculous appearance, he became suddenly quite at his ease, and approaching my stirrup, gave me a slap on the knee, and said:

"Come, you are a good fellow, though you are one of *the red*."

I felt in the bitterness of his accent, as he thus

designated the four red companies, how many angry prejudices the luxury and rank of these corps of officers had created in the army at large.

"However," he added, "I will not accept your offer, considering that I do not know how to mount a horse, and that, for my part, that is not my business."

"But, commandant, you superior officers are obliged to."

"Bah! once a year for inspection, and then a hired hack. As for me, I was always a sailor, and afterwards in the infantry; so that I know nothing about riding."

He went on for about twenty steps, looking sideways at me, as if expecting a question; but as he heard none, he presently continued himself:

"You are not very inquisitive, that's a fact! That ought to astonish you a little, what I said there."

"I am not often astonished," said I.

"Ah, but if I were to tell you how I came to quit the sea, then we should see."

"Very well," I answered, "why don't you try? That will warm us, and make me forget the rain that is pouring in at my back, and only stopping at my heels."

The good *chef-de-bataillon* prepared himself deliberately to speak, with all the pleasure of a

child. He adjusted his shako on his head, which was covered with black oilcloth, and gave that peculiar shrug of the shoulders, which none can imagine who have not served in the infantry,—that shrug of the shoulders which the soldier gives to raise his knapsack, and ease its weight for a moment. It is a habit of the soldier, which, when he becomes an officer, remains as a trick. After this jerking movement, he drank a little wine from his flask, administered a kick of encouragement to the little mule, and began.

II.—STORY OF THE SEALED ORDER.

“YOU must know then, in the first place, my boy, that I was born at Brest. I began by being troop-boy, gaining my half-ration, and my half-pay, at the age of nine years, as my father was a soldier in the Guards. But as I had a liking for the sea, one fine night when I was at Brest on leave of absence, I hid among the ropes of a merchant-ship bound to the Indies, and was not found until they were out at sea, when the captain preferred making a sailor-boy of me, to throwing me overboard. When the Revolution came on, I had made some headway, and was captain of a neat little trading vessel, having been tossed about the sea, like its foam, for fifteen years. As the old royal navy—a good old navy, faith, it was—found itself suddenly depopulated

of its officers, they took their captains from the merchant service. I had had some little brushes with the pirates which I will tell you about some other time, and they gave me the command of a small brig-of-war, named the *Mara*.

283 "On the 28th of Fructidor, 1797, I received orders to get ready for a voyage to Cayenne. I was to transport there sixty soldiers and a *déporté*, who had remained behind, of the one hundred and ninety-three which the frigate *La Decade* had taken on board some days before. I had orders to treat this individual with kindness, and the first letter of the Directory inclosed the second, sealed with three red seals, the middle one of which was of enormous size. I was forbidden to open this letter before reaching the first degree north latitude, and between the 27th and 28th of longitude—that is to say, when about crossing the line. This big letter was of a shape altogether peculiar. It was very long, and so tightly closed that I could not get at a word, either in at the corners or through the envelope. I am not superstitious, but it frightened me, that letter. I placed it in my cabin, under the glass of a poor little English clock, which was nailed up over my berth. Mine was a real sailor's bed, if you know what that is. But what am I talking about?—you have lived at most but sixteen summers; you can never have seen anything of that kind. A queen's chamber cannot be so neatly arranged as

a sailor's cabin—be it said without boasting. Everything has its own place, and its own nail ; nothing can move. The vessel may toss as much as she chooses, without putting anything out of order. The furniture is all made to fit the form of the vessel, and of one's own little room. My bed was a chest ; when it was opened, I slept in it ; and when it was shut, it was my sofa, and there I smoked my pipe. Sometimes it was my table, and then I sat on one of the little casks in the cabin. My floor was waxed and rubbed like mahogany, and shone like a jewel. A real looking-glass ! Oh, what a sweet little cabin it was !—and my brig, too, was not to be sneezed at. There was some fine fun on board there, and the voyage began this time pleasantly enough, but for— But I must not anticipate.

“ We had a fine breeze from the N. N. W., and I was busy putting away this letter under the glass of my clock, when my *déporté* entered my cabin ; he had by the hand a beautiful little girl of about seventeen, and he told me that he himself was only nineteen. A handsome fellow, though a little too pale, and too fair for a man. He was a man though, and a man who behaved better on this occasion than many an old one would have done—you will see. He had his little wife under his arm : she was as fresh and gay as a child. They looked like two doves. It really was a pleasure to see them.

“So said I :

“‘Ah, well, young ones, you come to pay a visit to the old captain, eh? That’s kind of you. I am taking you rather far away : but all the better, for we shall have the longer to make one another’s acquaintance. I am sorry to receive madame with my coat off, but you see I am nailing this big scamp of a letter up here. If you would only help me a little?’ ”

“They were really good little children. The little husband took the hammer, and the little wife the nails, and they would hand them to me, as I asked for them : and she would say, ‘To the right—to the left—captain!’—all the time laughing, because the knocking made my clock swing. I think I hear her yet, with her little voice, ‘To the right—to the left—captain!’” She was making fun of me. ‘Ah, ha,’ said I, ‘you little puss, I’ll make your husband scold you, you’ll see.’ Then she jumped upon his neck and kissed him : —they were indeed a charming pair, and so our acquaintance began. We were all at once good friends.

1851 “We had a fine passage, too. The weather seemed always made on purpose for us. As I had never had anything but dark faces on board my vessel, I made my two little lovers come to my table every day. It put me in spirits. When we had eaten our biscuit and fish, the little wife and her husband would sit looking at one

another, as though they had never seen each other before. Then I would set to laughing with all my might, and making fun of them. They would laugh, too, with me. You would have laughed to have seen us there like three imbeciles, not knowing what was the matter with us. The fact is, it was really pleasant to see them so fond of one another. They were contented anywhere: they found anything which was given them good. Still they were on allowance, like the rest of us. I only added a little Swedish brandy when they dined with me; only a little glass, just to keep up my rank. They slept in a hammock, where the vessel rolled them about like those two pears I have here, in this wet handkerchief. They were lively and contented. I did like you, I asked them no questions; what use was there for me to know their name and their business—me, a traverser of the waves? I carried them from one side of the ocean to the other, as I might have carried two *birds of paradise*.

“After a month I came to look upon them as my children. Every day when I called them, they came and sat near me. The young man wrote on my table (that is to say, on my bed), and when I wished it, he helped me to take my observation; he soon knew how to do it as well as myself,—I was quite astonished sometimes. The young woman would sit down upon a barrel and sew.

“One day, when they were fixed so, I said to them : ‘Do you know, my little friends, that we make quite a family picture as we now are ? I don’t wish to ask you any questions, but you probably have not any more money than you need, and you are very delicate, both of you, to dig and work, as the convicts at Cayenne do. It’s a wretched country, I can tell you, from the bottom of my heart ; but as for me, who am already an old wolf’s skin dried in the sun, I could live there like a lord. If you have, as I rather fancy you have (without wishing to catechise you), ever so little regard for me, I would willingly leave my old brig, which is at best but an old wooden shoe, and establish myself there with you, if you liked it. I have no more family than a dog, and I am tired of it. You would make a nice little company for me. I could help you to many things, and I have got together, honestly enough, quite a snug little affair in the contraband way, on which we might live, and which I would leave to you, when I should come to kick the bucket,—to speak politely.’

“They looked at each other with quite a bewildered air, as if they did not think I spoke the truth ; and then the little one ran, as she always did, and threw herself on the neck of the other, and sat upon his knees all crimson and weeping. He pressed her very closely in his arms, and I saw tears in his eyes too. He gave me his hand,

and became even paler than usual. She spoke in a low voice to him, and her long fair hair fell loose upon his shoulders. Its twist had got loosed like a cable suddenly unrolling, for she was as lively as a fish. That hair, if you had seen it!—it was just like gold. As they continued to speak together in a low voice, he kissing her forehead from time to time, I became impatient :

“ ‘ Well, does that suit you ? ’ said I at length.

“ ‘ But—but—captain—you are very good, but you cannot live with convicts,—and—’ He cast his eyes down as he spoke.

“ ‘ As for me,’ said I, ‘ I don’t know what you have done to be transported for. You will tell me that some of these days—or never, if you choose. You don’t look as if you had a very heavy conscience, and I am sure that I have done many a worse thing than you, in my life, my poor innocent little souls. Now, so long as you are under my guard, I shall not let you go, you may be sure of that; I would rather wring your necks like two pigeons. But the epaulette once off, I know no longer admiral nor anything else.’

“ ‘ The fact is,’ he answered, mournfully shaking his brown head, though a little powdered, as was still the fashion of that day,—‘ the fact is, I think it would be dangerous for you, captain, to seem to know us. We laugh because we are

young ; we look happy because we love one another ; but I have many a miserable moment when I think of the future, and I know not what will become of my poor Laura.' And he again pressed the head of his young wife to his bosom.

" 'That was what I ought to say to the captain,' added he, 'was it not, my child? You would have said the same thing, would n't you?'

" 'I took my pipe, and rose, because I felt that my eyes were becoming somewhat moist, and that does n't become me very well.

" 'Come, come,' said I, 'this will all clear up by and by ; if the smoke of my pipe incommodes madame, she must go away.'

" 'She raised her face all scarlet and wet with tears, like a child which has been scolded.

" 'Besides,' said she, looking at my clock, 'you forget *that* there—the letter?'

" 'I felt something that struck home to me at these words—something like a sudden pain at the roots of my hair as she spoke.

" ' *Pardieu!* I did not think of that,' said I. 'This is a pretty piece of business, to be sure. If we had only crossed the first degree of north latitude, nothing would be left for me but to jump overboard. Can't I get tolerably happy, but this child here must remind me of that big scamp of a letter!'

" 'I looked quickly at my sea-chart, and when

I saw that we had yet a week to sail, my head was relieved, but not my heart—I knew not why.

“‘It’s no joking matter with the Directory about the article obedience,’ said I. ‘Well, I am all straight this time. Time has passed so quickly, that I had completely forgotten that.’

“Well, sir, there we remained, all three of us, with our noses in the air, looking up at that letter, as if it could speak. What struck me forcibly was that the sun, as it shone through the bull’s-eye, fell upon the glass of the clock, and lighting the spot, made the great red seal and the other small ones appear like the features of a face in the midst of fire.

“Would n’t one say that its eyes were coming out of its head?’ said I, to amuse them.

“‘Oh, dearest!’ said the girl, shuddering, ‘they look like spots of blood!’

“‘Nonsense,’ said her husband, taking her in his arms, ‘you deceive yourself, Laura; it looks like a wedding invitation. Come and rest yourself—come! Why do you trouble yourself about that letter?’

“They hurried off as if a ghost were after them, and went on deck.

“I remained alone with the big letter, and I remember that, as I smoked my pipe, I kept my gaze fixed on it as if it had riveted my eyes by meeting them, like those of a snake. Its great

pale face—that third seal, larger than the eyes—open, ravenous, like the jaws of a wolf—all that put me in a very bad humor. I took my coat and hung it over the clock, that I might see neither the hour nor that d—— of a letter.

“I went to finish my pipe on deck, and remained there till night. We were then about on a line with the Cape de Verd islands. The *Marat* cut through the water, wind astern, over ten knots with ease. The night was the most beautiful one I have ever seen near the tropic. The moon was just rising at the horizon, large as a sun; the sea divided it in the middle, and became all white, like a sheet of snow covered over with little diamonds. I looked at it all from the bench where I sat smoking. The officer of the watch and the sailors did not speak, and, like me, were looking at the shadow of the brig on the water. I was glad to hear nothing; I like silence and order. I had forbidden all noise and all fires. Nevertheless, I perceived a small red streak almost under my feet. I should immediately have put myself in a passion, but as it came from the cabin of my little convicts, I wished to satisfy myself what they were about before I got angry. I had only to lean over and I could see through the skylight of the little cabin, and I looked down. The young girl was on her knees at her prayers. There was a little lamp which cast its light upon her. She was in her night-

dress, and I saw from above, her bare shoulders, her little naked feet, and her long fair hair all afloat. I thought I would retire; but, nonsense! said I to myself—an old soldier like me, what harm is there?—and so I remained.

“Her husband was seated on a small trunk, his head on his hands, watching her as she prayed. She raised her face as though to heaven, and I saw her large blue eyes wet like those of a Magdalen. Whilst she was praying he took the ends of her long hair and kissed them without disturbing her. When she had finished she made the sign of the cross, smiling as though she were just going to Paradise. I saw him also make the sign of the cross after her, but as if he were ashamed of it. And, indeed, for a man, such a thing is a little singular.

“She rose, kissed him, and stretched herself the first in the hammock, where he threw her in as they put to bed a child in a cradle. The heat was stifling, and she seemed to find pleasure in the rocking motion of the vessel. Her tiny white feet were crossed and raised to the level of her head, and her whole person wrapped in her long white dress. Oh! she was a perfect little love.

“‘Dearest,’ said she, already half asleep, ‘are you not sleepy? Do you know it is very late?’

“He remained still with his head in his hands, without answering. This made her a little anx-

ious, the sweet child, and she raised her pretty head out of the hammock, like a bird out of its nest, and looked at him with her lips parted, not venturing to speak again.

“At last he said: ‘Oh! dear Laura! the nearer we approach to America, I cannot help it, but so much the sadder I become. I know not why it is, but I feel as if this voyage will have been the happiest part of our life.’

“‘And so it seems to me,’ said she, ‘and I wish we might never arrive.’

“He looked at her, pressing his hands together with an expression of feeling you cannot imagine.

“‘And yet, my angel, you always weep when you pray to God,’ said he, ‘and that distresses me sadly, for I well know whom you are thinking of, and I fear you are sorry for what you have done.’

“‘I sorry!’ said she, with a look of much pain, —‘I sorry to have followed you, dearest! Do you think that because I had been yours so short a time, I loved you the less? Is one not a woman and does one not know one’s duty at seventeen? My mother and my sisters, did they not say that it was my duty to follow you to Guiana? Did they not say I was doing nothing wonderful? I am only surprised that you should have been so touched by it, dearest: it was all perfectly natural. And now I do not know how you can imagine

that I regret anything, when I am with you, to help you to live, or to die if you die.'

"She said all this with so sweet a voice, one would have thought it was music. I was a good deal moved by it, and said to myself: 'Good little wife—yes, indeed!'

"The young man sighed with grief as he stamped on the floor with his foot, and kissed a pretty little hand and a bare arm which she extended to him.

" 'Oh, Laurette, my own Laurette!' said he, 'when I think, that if we had only delayed our marriage for a few days, I should have been seized alone, and sent off alone, I cannot forgive myself.'

"Then the beautiful girl stretched her beautiful white arms, bare to the shoulders, out of the hammock, and caressed his brow, his hair, his eyes, taking his head between her hands as though to carry it away and hide it in her bosom. She smiled like a child, and said a thousand sweet little womanly things, such as I, for my part, had never heard anything of the kind before. She shut his mouth playfully with her fingers, so as to have all the speaking to herself, and wiping his eyes with her long hair, as with a handkerchief, she said: 'And is it not a great deal better to have a wife with you who loves you—say, dearest? I am perfectly content to go to Cayenne; I shall see savages and cocoa-nut trees,

like those of "Paul and Virginia," sha'n't I? We will each plant our own. We shall see who will be the best gardener. And we will make a little hut for us two. I will work all day and all night, if you wish. I am strong; see—look at my arms; see, I could almost lift you. Don't laugh at me. And besides, I am excellent in embroidering, and is there not some city thereabouts where embroiderers are wanted? And then I will give lessons in music and drawing, if they choose; and if they know how to read there, you can write, you know.'

"I remember that the poor fellow was in such despair that a loud cry escaped him as she spoke thus. 'To write!' he exclaimed, 'to write!' and he seized his right hand with his left, pressing it tightly at the wrist. 'Ah! to write! Why have I ever known how to write! To write! it is the trade of fools. I believed in their liberty of the press—where were my senses? And, to do what? To print five or six poor ideas, common-place enough, read only by those who like them, and thrown into the fire by those who hate them, serving no other end but to bring persecution upon us. As for me, it is of little consequence; but you, beautiful angel, scarcely four days a wife, what had you done! Tell me, tell me, I entreat of you, how I came to suffer you to carry your goodness so far as to follow me here! Do you know where you are, poor girl?

and whither you are going? You will soon, my child, be sixteen hundred leagues away from your mother and your sisters. And for me! all this for me!’

“She hid her head for a moment in the hammock, and I, from above, could see she was weeping; but he from below did not perceive it, and when she uncovered her face it was already brightened by a smile, to enliven and cheer him.

“‘In truth we are not very rich just now,’ said she, bursting into a laugh; ‘see, here is my purse, I have only one single louis. And you!’

“He began also to laugh like a child: ‘Faith! I had a crown left, but I gave it to the little boy who carried your trunk.’

“‘Oh, well! what difference does that make?’ said she, snapping her little white fingers like castanets; ‘people are never so merry as when they have nothing; and besides, have I not yet in reserve the two diamond rings that my mother gave me? Those are good everywhere, and for everything, are they not? Whenever you choose we will sell them. And besides, I am sure that that dear old soul, the captain, does not tell us all his good intentions for us, and that he knows very well what is in the letter. I am sure it is a recommendation for us to the Governor of Cayenne.’

“‘Perhaps so,’ said he, ‘who knows?’

“‘And then,’ added his little wife, ‘you are so

good that I am sure the government has only exiled you for a short time, but has no thought of harm against you.'

"She had said that so sweetly, when she called me 'that dear old soul the captain,' that I was quite touched and melted, and I rejoiced in my very heart that she had perhaps guessed truly. They began anew to embrace one another; and I stamped loudly on the deck to make them stop.

"'Eh! how now, my little friends,' I cried, 'the order is to put out all the lights on board the ship; blow out your lamp if you please.'

"They obeyed, and I heard them laughing and talking below, in the dark, like school-children. I, for my part, relit my pipe and walked the deck by myself. All the tropical stars were at their posts, large as little moons. I watched them, and breathed an air which seemed fresh and sweet. I said to myself that the good little folks had certainly guessed the truth, and my spirits mounted at the thought. I would have wagered anything that one of the five Directors had changed his mind, and recommended them to my care. I did not very well explain to myself the how or the why of the matter, because there are affairs of state which I for my part never understood; but I fully believed it, and without knowing why, I was made happy by it.

"I took my little night lantern and went to look at the letter under my old uniform. It had

altogether a different air now ; it seemed to smile, and the seals to be the color of roses. I had no longer any suspicion of its good intentions, and gave it a little nod of friendship.

“ However, notwithstanding all that, I hung my old coat over it ; I was tired of it. We thought no more of looking at it for some days, and we were very merry. But as we approached the first degree of latitude, we began to leave off talking.

“ One fine morning I awoke, surprised enough to feel no motion of the ship. The fact is, I sleep with only one eye shut, as they say, and as I missed the tossing, I opened them both. We had got into a dead calm, and it was under the first degree of north latitude and the twentieth of longitude. I put my head on deck ; the sea was as smooth as if it were of oil, and the open sails hung down glued to the masts, like empty balloons. I immediately said to myself, as I gave a sidelong glance at the letter : ‘ Very well, I shall have plenty of time to read you,’ and waited till the evening, till sunset. But it had to be done sooner or later, so I uncovered the clock, and drew from under it the sealed order. Well, sir, I held it in my hand for a quarter of an hour, without being able to open it. At last I said, *This is too bad!* and broke the three seals with one movement of my thumb, and as for the big red seal, I rubbed it to powder. When I had read

it, I rubbed my eyes, thinking they must have deceived me.

“I read the letter over again from the beginning to the end ; I read it through ; I read it all over again and again. I began again at the last line and went up to the first ; I could not believe it. My legs shook a little under me ; I felt a peculiar quivering of the skin of my face, and I rubbed my cheeks with rum, and put some in the hollow of my hands. I was really ashamed of myself for being such a child—but it was only the affair of a moment. I went on deck to take a little air.

“Laurette was that day so pretty, that I would not go near her. She had on a little simple white dress, her arms bare to her neck, and her long hair flowing, as she always wore it. She was amusing herself with dipping her other dress into the sea, from the end of a cord, and laughed to see that the ocean was as tranquil and pure as a spring of which she could see the bottom.

“‘Come and see the sand ! come quick !’ she cried, and her husband leaned upon her and bent over, but did not look at the water, for he was looking at her with a touching air of tenderness. I made a sign to the young man to come to speak to me on the quarter-deck. She turned round,—I don’t know how I looked, but she let her rope drop, and grasped him convulsively by the arm, saying, ‘Oh, don’t go ! he is so pale !’ That

might well be ; it was enough to make one turn pale. Still he came toward me on the quarter-deck. She stood leaning against the main-mast, following us with her eyes, as we walked up and down without a word. I lit a cigar, which I found bitter, and spit it out into the water. He watched my eye ; I took him by the arm—I was choking—upon my word I was choking.

“ ‘Come, come, now,’ said I at length, ‘my little friend, tell me something of your history. What the d—— have you done to those five hounds of lawyers, who are there like five pieces of a king. They seem to owe you a heavy grudge. It’s very queer.’

“He shrugged his shoulders, bending his head down—with such a sweet smile, poor boy!—and said :

“ ‘Oh ! captain, nothing much, depend upon it. Three satirical verses upon the Directory, that is all.’

“ ‘It is n’t possible !’ said I.

“ ‘Oh, yes, indeed ! and the verses were not even very good ones. I was arrested the 15th of Fructidor, and taken to La Force ; tried on the 16th, and sentenced first to death, then, through clemency, to transportation.’

“ ‘That’s queer,’ said I ; ‘these Directors must be very susceptible fellows, for that letter you know of orders me to shoot you.’

“He did not answer, and smiled with a manly

face enough for a boy of nineteen. He only looked at his wife, and wiped his forehead, on which stood big drops of sweat ; I had as many on my face, too, and others in my eyes. I continued :

“ ‘ It seems those citizens did not wish to do your business on shore ; they thought that at sea it would not be so much noticed. But it’s very hard for me ! It’s all of no use that you are such a fine fellow, I can’t escape from it ; the sentence of death is there complete, and the order for the execution signed and sealed ; there’s nothing omitted.’ ”

“ He bowed very politely, though his face was crimsoned, and said, with a voice as sweet as usual : ‘ I ask for nothing, captain ; I should be grieved to make you fail in your duty. I should only like to speak a moment to Laurette, and to entreat you to protect her, in case she should survive me,—which I do not think she will.’ ”

“ ‘ Ah ! as for that, it is but right, my boy ; and, if you have no objections, I will take her to her own family, on my return to France, and only leave her when she wishes to see me no more. But it strikes me you need not fear that she will recover from this blow—poor little soul ! ’ ”

“ He took my two hands, pressed them, and said :

“ ‘ My dear captain, you suffer more than I do, from what yet remains to be done. I feel it in-

deed, but it cannot be helped. I rely upon you to preserve for her the little that belongs to me, to watch over her, and to see that she receives whatever her aged mother may leave her, will you not? to guard her life, her honor; and that her health is also always well taken care of, will you not? You see,' he added, in a lower voice, 'I must tell you that she is very delicate, and often so much troubled by her breast as to faint several times a day. She must always keep herself well covered. In a word, you will take the place, as much as possible, of her father, her mother, and me, will you not? I should be glad if she could keep the rings her mother gave her. But, if it is necessary that they should be sold for her, be it so. My poor Laurette!—see how beautiful she is!'

"As this began to be a little too tender, I became tired of it, and set to knitting my brows. I had spoken cheerfully to him so as not to weaken him, but I could stand it no longer. 'Enough,' said I, 'we understand each other. Go and speak to her, and let us make haste.'

"I pressed his hand as a friend, and as he did not let it go, but kept looking at me with a singular expression, I added: 'I'll tell you what it is, if I had any advice to give you, it would be to say nothing to her about that matter. We will arrange the thing without her expecting it, nor you either; make yourself easy—that's my affair.'

“‘Ah!’ said he, ‘I did not know that. That will certainly be better. Besides, those farewells!—those farewells!—they weaken one.’

“‘Yes, yes,’ said I, ‘don’t make a child of yourself, that’s much the best way. Don’t kiss her, if you can help it; if you do, you are lost.’

“I gave him another good grasp of the hand, and left him. Oh! all this was very hard for me!

“He seemed to me to keep the secret well; for they walked arm in arm for a quarter of an hour, and then returned to the edge of the water to take the rope and the dress which one of the cabin boys had fished up.

“Night came on suddenly. It was the moment I had resolved to seize. But that moment has lasted me till the present time, and I shall drag it along all my life, like a cannon-ball.” Here the old commandant was obliged to stop, and I took care not to speak, for fear of turning his ideas out of their channel. He began again, striking his breast:

“That moment, I assure you, I can’t understand it yet. I felt the deepest rage seize upon my whole heart, and at the same time something or other, I don’t know what, was forcing me to obey, and pushing me forward. I summoned the officers and said to them:

“‘Come! a boat in the water, since we are

now executioners. Put that girl into it, and keep rowing off until you hear the report of firing; you will then return.'

"The idea of obeying a piece of paper that way!—for after all it was but that. There must have been something in the air which forced me on. I caught a glimpse of that young man—oh! it was horrible to see!—kneeling before his Laurette, and kissing her knees and her feet. Wasn't it a hard case for me? I shouted like a madman, 'Separate them!—we are all a set of wretches—separate them! The poor Republic is a dead body—Directors, Directory, vermin all! I quit the sea for ever! I'm not afraid of all your lawyers! Let them tell them what I say—what do I care?' Oh! but I did care for them! I would have wished to have held them in my grasp, and shot them all five, the scoundrels! Oh, yes! I would have done it. I cared for my life about as much as for that water that's pouring there—yes, indeed,—as if I cared for that—a life like mine—ah, yes, indeed—mere life—bah—"

And the voice of the commandant gradually went out, and became as indistinct as his words; and he walked on biting his lips and knitting his brows in a terrific and fierce abstraction. He had little twitching movements, and gave his mule knocks with the scabbard of his sword, as if he wished to kill it. And what astonished me

was to see the yellow skin of his face flush to a deep red. He undid his coat on his breast, and threw it violently open, baring it to the rain and the wind.

"I can well understand," said I, as though he had finished his story, "how, after so cruel an adventure, you should have taken an abhorrence to your business."

"Oh! as for the business, are you crazy?" said he, quickly; "it is not the business. No captain of a vessel will ever be forced to turn executioner, except when governments of assassins and thieves get on foot, who will take advantage of the habit a poor man has of always obeying, blindly obeying with a miserable mechanical compulsion in spite of his very self."

At the same time he drew out of his pocket a red handkerchief, and began to weep like a child. I stopped for a moment, as if to arrange my stirrup, and hanging back behind his wagon, walked some time after him, for I felt that he would be mortified if I perceived too plainly his streaming tears.

I had judged rightly, for in about a quarter of an hour he also came behind the poor little wagon, and asked me if I had any razors in my portmanteau; to which I simply answered, that, as I had no beard yet, they would be very unnecessary to me. But he did not care about that; it was to speak of something else. I soon

was glad to see that he was returning to his story, for he suddenly said :

“ You never have seen a ship, have you ? ”

“ I never have,” answered I, “ excepting in the Panorama of Paris, and I would not trust much to the nautical science I derived from that.”

“ Then you do not know what the catheads are ? ”

“ I have not the least idea,” said I.

“ They are a kind of beams projecting in front from the bows of the vessel, from which the anchor is thrown off. When a man is to be shot, he is usually placed there,” he added in a low tone.

“ Oh ! I understand, so that he then falls into the water ? ”

He did not answer, but began to describe the small boats of a vessel. And then, and without any order in his ideas, he continued his tale, with that affected air of unconcern, which a long service in the army invariably gives, because you must show your inferiors your contempt of danger, your contempt of men, your contempt of life, your contempt of death, and even your contempt of yourself. And all this generally hides, under a rough envelope, very deep feelings. The roughness of a soldier is like a mask of iron over a noble face ; like the stone dungeon that incloses a royal prisoner.

“ These boats hold more than eight rowers,”

he continued. "They seized Laurette and placed her in one, before she had time either to cry or to speak. Ah! this is a thing which no honest man can ever find comfort for when it has been his doing. You may talk as you please, one never forgets such an affair. Ah, what weather this is!—what the d—— could have possessed me to tell you all this? Whenever I begin this, I can't stop. It is a story which makes me fairly drunk like the Jurançon wine. Ah, what weather it is! My cloak is soaked through!

"I was telling you, I believe, still about that little Laurette! Poor girl!—What clumsy people there are in the world! My sailors were so stupid as to take the boat straight ahead of the brig. After all, it's true one cannot foresee everything. For my own part, I had counted on the night to hide the matter, and did not think about the flash a dozen muskets would make, fired at once. And the fact is that from the boat she saw her husband fall into the water—shot. If there is a God up there, He only knows how what I am going to tell you took place; as for me, I know nothing about it, but it was seen and heard, as I see and hear you. At the moment of the fire, she raised her hand to her forehead, as if a ball had struck her there, and sat down in the boat without fainting, without screaming, and returned to the brig just when they wanted her, and just as they wanted her.

I went to her, and talked to her a long time, the best I could. She seemed to be listening to me, and looked me in the face, rubbing her forehead with her hands. But she did not understand; and her face was quite pale, and her forehead red. She trembled all over, as if she was afraid of everybody. She has remained so ever since—in just the same state, poor little soul!—an idiot, or imbecile, as it were, or crazy, or whatever you please. Nobody has ever drawn a word out of her, except when she asks to have what she has in her head taken out.

“From that hour I became as melancholy as herself, and I felt something in me which said: ‘*Stand by her till the end of thy days, and watch over her.*’ I have done it. When I returned to France, I asked leave to pass with my rank into the army, having taken an aversion to the sea, for the innocent blood I had cast into it. I sought out Laurette’s family. Her mother was dead, and her sisters, to whom I brought her crazy, did not want the trouble of her, and offered to place her at Charanton. I turned my back upon them, and kept her with me.

“If you want to see her, comrade, you have only to say the word. Here—hold on. Ho!—ho!—you beast!”

III.—HOW I CONTINUED MY JOURNEY.

AND he stopped his poor mule, who seemed delighted that I had asked that question. At the same time he lifted the oilcloth cover of the little wagon, as if to arrange the straw, which nearly filled it, and I saw something very mournful. I saw two blue eyes, of enormous size, indeed, but of admirable shape, starting out from a face that was thin and lengthened, covered over with waves of loose, fair hair. In fact, I saw nothing but those two eyes, which seemed the whole of that poor woman, for all the rest was dead. Her forehead was red, and her cheeks hollow and pale, with a bluish tinge. She was bent double in the midst of the straw, so that only her two knees were seen out of it, on which she was playing dominoes all by herself. She looked at us for a moment, trembled for a long time, smiled a little at me, and went on with her game. She seemed to be trying to see how her right hand could beat her left.

“You see, she has been playing that game for a month,” said the *chef-de-bataillon*, “to-morrow it will, perhaps, be another game, which will last a long time. It’s queer, eh?”

At the same time he set about arranging the oilcloth of his shako, which the rain had somewhat disordered.

“Poor Laurette !” said I, “ah, you have lost the game for ever !”

I neared my horse to the wagon, and stretched out my hand to her ; she gave me hers mechanically, and smiled with a great deal of sweetness. I observed with surprise two diamond rings on her long, thin fingers. I supposed they were still her mother’s rings, and wondered how their poverty had left them there. For the world I would not have made a remark upon it to the old commandant, but as he followed my eyes, and saw them fixed on Laurette’s fingers, he said, with a certain air of pride :

“They are pretty large diamonds, are they not ? They might bring a good price if necessary. But I was never willing that she should part from them, poor child ! If you but touch them she weeps ; and she never leaves them off. Otherwise she never complains ; and now and then she can sew. I have kept my word to her poor young husband, and, to tell the truth, I have never repented it. I have never left her, and have always said she was my crazy daughter. As such she has always been respected. These things are managed better in the army than they imagine in Paris. She went through all the wars of the Emperor with me, and I have always kept her out of harm’s way. She has always been kept warm ; with straw and a little wagon that is never impossible. She has had pretty comfortable

things about her ; and as I was a *chef-de-bataillon*, with good pay, my legion of honor pension, and the Napoleon month, the pay of which was double in those times, I was always well off, and she gave me no trouble. On the contrary, her pretty childish ways often amused the officers of the light 7th."

He then approached her, and slapped her gently on the shoulder, as he would have done to his little mule.

"Well, now, my daughter, talk a little to the lieutenant. Come—let's see—a little sign of the head !"

She busied herself anew with her dominoes.

"Oh !" said he, "she is a little cross to-day, because it rains. However, she never takes cold. Crazy people never get sick, you know ; it's very convenient in that respect. At the Beresina, and through all the retreat from Moscow, she went bare-headed. Come, my dear child, play on, play on—don't let us disturb you ; take your own way, then, Laurette."

She took hold of the coarse, black hand which he rested on her shoulder, and carried it timidly to her lips, like a poor slave. I felt my heart sink at that kiss, and turned my bridle quickly away.

"Shall we not resume our march, commandant ?" said I, "it will be night before we reach Béthune."

The commandant carefully scraped the mud from his boots with the end of his sword ; he then mounted on the step of the wagon, drew forward over Laurette's head the hood of a little cloak she had on, took off his own black silk cravat, and put it round the neck of his adopted daughter ; after which he gave a kick to his mule, and saying, "Get along, you lazy beast !" we continued our journey.

The rain was still falling gloomily ; we found on the road only dead horses, abandoned, with their saddles. The gray sky and gray earth stretched out without end ; a sort of dead light, a pale wet sun was sinking behind some large windmills, which did not turn, and we fell back into a long silence.

I looked at the old commandant ; he walked on with long strides and untiring energy, whilst his mule could hardly keep along, and even my horse began to droop his head. The brave old fellow took off his shako from time to time, to wipe his bald forehead and the few gray hairs on his head, or his white moustache from which the rain was dripping. He did not think anything about the effect his recital might have produced on me ; he had made himself out neither better nor worse than he was ; he had not deigned to draw himself ; he did not think of himself ; and at the end of a quarter of an hour, he began on the same key a much longer story of a campaign

of Marshal Massena, in which he had formed his battalion in a square against some cavalry or other. I did not listen to him, although he grew quite warm, in endeavoring to prove to me the superiority of infantry over cavalry.

Night came on ; we did not get along fast ; the mud became thicker and deeper. Nothing on the road, and nothing at the end of it. We stopped at the foot of a dead tree, the only tree on the road ; he bestowed his first cares on his mule, as I did on my horse ; he then looked into the wagon, as a mother would have done into the cradle of her child. I heard him say :

“Come, my dear, put this overcoat on your feet, and try to sleep. Come, that is right ! she has not been touched by a drop of rain. Ah, the d—— ! she has broken my watch which I had left round her neck. Oh, my poor silver watch ! Come, come, it’s no matter, my child, try to sleep. The fine weather will soon come back again. It’s queer, she always has a fever—that’s the way with crazy people—see, here is some chocolate for you, my child.”

He rested the wagon against the tree, and we sat down on the wheels, under cover from the everlasting rain, each with a little loaf,—a poor supper.

“I am sorry we have nothing but this,” said he, “but it is better than horseflesh baked under ashes, with powder for salt, such as we had in

Russia. The poor little soul, I must always give her the best I have; you see, I put it on one side for her; she cannot bear to suffer the vicinity of a man, since the affair of the letter. I am old, and she seems to fancy me to be her father; yet she would strangle me, if I attempted to kiss her, even upon her forehead. Their early education must always leave some impression on them, for I have never seen her once forget to veil herself like a nun. It's queer, eh?"

Whilst he was thus talking to me, we heard her sigh and say: "*Take away this lead! take away this lead!*" I rose in spite of myself; he made me sit down again.

"Stay, stay," said he; "it is no matter. She says that all her life, because she always fancies she feels a ball in her head. That does not hinder her doing all that she is told to do, and that with the greatest sweetness."

I listened mournfully to him, but without any reply. I calculated that, from 1797 to 1815, eighteen years had thus passed with this man. I remained a long while in silence by his side, trying to explain to myself such a character, and such a fate. I then abruptly gave him an enthusiastic shake of the hand; he did not know what to make of it.

"You are a worthy man," said I.

"What for?" he answered. "Because of this poor woman? You see perfectly well, my boy,

that was a duty." And he began to talk again about Massena.

The next morning, by daylight, we arrived at Béthune, an ugly little fortified town, the ramparts of which, in narrowing their circle, seemed to have squeezed the houses together upon each other. All was in confusion ; it was the moment of an *alerte*. The inhabitants were taking the white flags from the windows, and sewing the tricolors to their houses ; the arms were beating the *générale*, and the trumpets sounded *to horse !* by order of the Duc de Berry. The long Picard wagons carrying the Hundred-Swiss and their baggage, the cannons of the Body-Guard hurrying to their ramparts, the carriages of the princes, the mustering the squadrons of the red companies, blocked up the town. The sight of the Gens-d'armes of the king, and the Mousquetaires, made me forget my old travelling companion. I rejoined my company, and lost sight of the little wagon and its poor occupant in the crowd. To my great regret, it was for ever that I lost them.

It was the first time in my life that I had read the depths of the true heart of a soldier. This adventure revealed to me an aspect of human nature, which I had not seen before, and which the nation little knows and ill rewards. I placed it from that time high in my esteem. I have often since sought around me for a man like that one, and capable of such an entire and careless

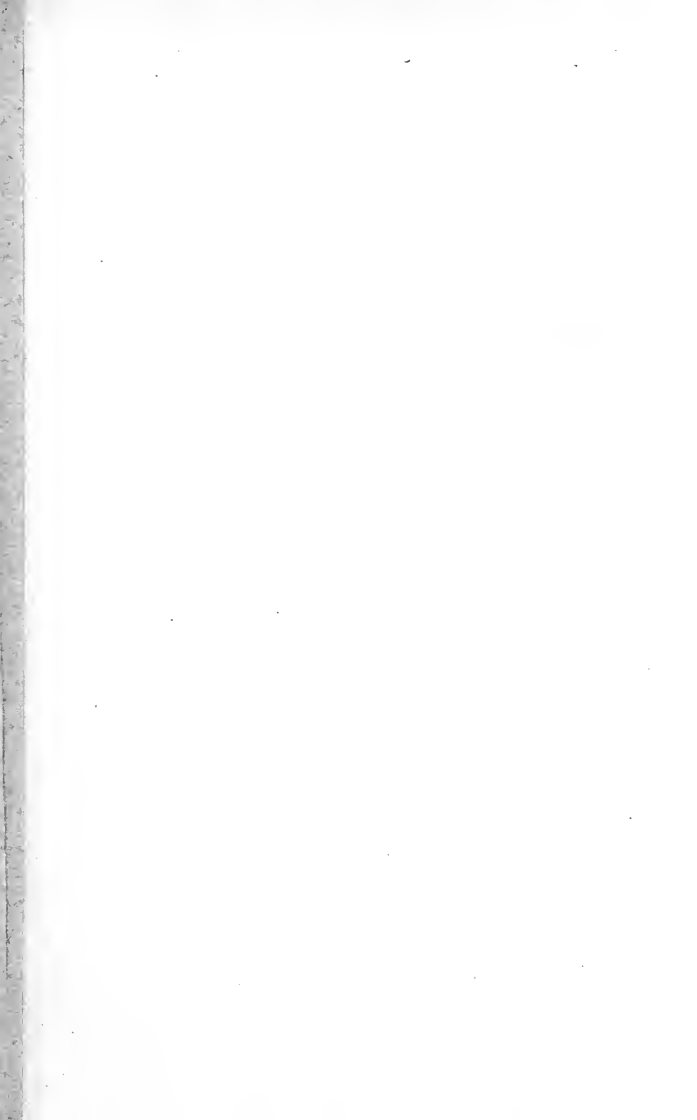
abnegation of self. During the fourteen years I have lived in the army, it is only there, and above all in the poor and despised ranks of the infantry, that I have found those men of an antique stamp carrying out the feeling of *duty* to all its possible consequences ; knowing neither remorse for obedience, nor shame for poverty ; simple in their manners, and in their speech ; proud of the glory of the nation, but careless of their own ; shutting themselves up cheerfully in their own obscurity, to divide with the unfortunate the black bread they pay for with their blood.

I remained long ignorant of what had become of my poor *chef-de-bataillon*, especially as he had not told me his name, and I had not asked him. One day, however, at a coffee-house, I believe in 1825, an old captain of infantry to whom I was describing him, as we were waiting for parade, said :

“Eh, *pardieu*, I knew that poor devil ! He was a brave fellow,—he came down by a ball at Waterloo. And he had, in fact, left a crazy girl with the baggage, whom we took to the hospital at Amiens, as we went to the army of the Loire, and who died there raving mad, at the end of three days.”

“I can readily imagine it,” said I, “she had lost her foster-father.”





14 DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED
LOAN DEPT.

This book is due on the last date stamped below,
or on the date to which renewed. Renewals only:

Tel. No. 642-3405

Renewals may be made 4 days prior to date due.
Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

REC'D LD JAN 28 '73 -3 PM 83

JUN 6 1975 82

REC. CIR. FEB 3 '75

NOV 15 1975

REC. CIR. AUG 14 '75

APR 08 1989

AUTO. DISC.

APR 03 1989

CIRCULATION

U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIE



C006797919

